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Burd Bayard's Close Call; Or, IN THE DEATH NET.

BY CAPT. R. M. HAWTHORNE.



BAYARD ADVANCED WITH THE CARE AND CAUTION OF AN ASSASSIN STEALING UPON HIS VICTIM.

Burd Bayard's Close Call;

OR,

IN THE DEATH-NET.

BY CAPT. R. M. HAWTHORNE,
AUTHOR OF "HURRICANE GULCH," "MAX
CRUMM'S CRYPTOGRAM," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE ALBATROSS.

TOWARD the close of a lovely day in spring-time the schooner Albatross came to anchor in an arm of the Chesapeake, off the straggling town of Buzzard's Roost, on the West Shore. The tide was in, and the water where the natty vessel lay was deep enough to float an iron-clad frigate.

Hardly was the splash of the forked iron as it sunk from the prow of the Albatross heard on shore when a small boat containing six men put out from the schooner's side. Making straight for the wharf they landed, and five of them headed for the old tavern in front of which had creaked the sign of the Golden Boar from the days of the Revolution.

They entered the dingy inn, while the sixth continued up the highway, as though he had no further interest in the seamen from whom he had parted company.

The five who strode into the bar-room were strangers in Buzzard's Roost, neither the landlord nor any of the loungers there remembering ever having seen them before. The sixth person was of medium size, with immense bushy whiskers covering his breast, while his sailor hat was drawn close over his eyes. He carried a large cane, which must have been intended as a means of defense, since such an athletic young man could not have needed its aid in walking.

Taking the broad highway, this person strode off toward the old mansion known since colonial days as The Cedars, and which had been the home of the Havens from the days of Lord Baltimore.

This young man, the captain of the Albatross, walked so rapidly that the intervening two miles were passed sooner than he intended, for the sun was still above the horizon when he came in sight of the huge gray-stone mansion. Noticing the fact, he muttered several words, and then, turning his face toward Buzzard's Roost, walked a half-mile at a leisurely pace before coming back in the direction of The Cedars.

By this time all sunlight was gone and twilight had settled over the earth. The sailor paused, and, leaning against the fence at the roadside, gazed off into vacancy as though lost in deep reverie. Suddenly he passed his hand over his chin, and when he drew it away the whole luxuriant wealth of black beard followed, leaving his face clear and clean as that of a girl.

"I haven't much faith in this disguise," said the young captain, holding off the hirsute appendage and surveying it. "I feel so awkward with it tacked on to my face that I'm sure every one I meet suspects the truth. However, it's growing dark—"

He started like a thief in the night as he caught a heavy footstep behind him, and whirling about saw a negro standing within six feet of him, too terrified to speak.

"Golly gracious! hope you'll 'scuse me," said the darky, with chattering teeth, "but you stood so close to de fence dat I didn't see you till arter I see'd you, and if I had see'd yer afore I see'd yer, why, I wouldn't hab—dat is, see'd yer."

While this jumble was falling from the negro's lips the sailor was holding his beard in his hand. Recalling the grotesque blunder, he turned his head, and in a twinkling the whiskers were restored to their place.

But for that glimpse of the African the young captain might have played the part of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with some success, but he knew he had failed, and he was aflame with chagrin as he faced the negro whom he saw moving off.

"Hold on, there!" commanded the sailor, so sharply that the other halted, though it was apparent he was ill at ease.

"'Scuse me," pleaded the negro, his voice still tremulous, "but I promised missis I wouldn't hab anything to do wid de debbil—so I'll bid you good-night and go home!"

"No, you won't," warned the young captain, stepping threateningly toward him; "where are you going?"

"Home—up dar!" replied the negro, pointing in the direction of The Cedars, the great rambling structure invisible in the wealth of trees and vegetation by which it was surrounded. "It's late already and I hope you'll 'scuse me, for if I'm late ag'in I'll get lammed."

"You can go when I am through with you and not before," declared the sailor so sternly that the other became all meekness at once. "Tell your missis that you were stopped by a robber, and that if you hadn't done what he told you to do, he would have killed you."

"Dat's de trouble," returned the negro—"dat's de wery story I hab been tellin' her fur de last free months and a half, till I'm 'feared she begins to feel some doubts ob my veracity."

"Your name is Pompey and you are a servant of Colonel Haven."

"Golly gracious! who told you dat?" demanded the astonished negro; "you hit it de fu'st time, only I s'pose you know dat Colonel Haven hab been dead six months."

"What! Colonel Haven dead?" exclaimed the sailor, starting back. "How long ago did you say it took place?"

"A little more dan six months. It came on de colonel mighty suddint, jes' while he was a-settin' at de dinner-table and touchin' his glass to dat ob de missis and drinkin' her health. I tell yer, Mr. Debbil," added Pompey with a sniff as he drew his hand across his eyes, "we all miss him, fur he war a kind master."

The young man was deeply affected by the news and held his peace until the servant had overcome his emotion. Suddenly the latter looked up in a peculiar way.

"De colonel didn't die right off, you know. He fell out ob his cheer onto de floor, and while dey was doin' what dey could for him, I jumped onto Thunderbolt and sent him flyin' arter Dr. Hazeltine, but it warn't no use; afore de doctor got dar de colonel war dead, and," added the negro in an awed voice, "afore he died who do you s'pose comed to see him?"

"How should I know?" impatiently asked the young captain.

"Yer see, Pete told me all about it. It war Muriel—de gal come—nobody could tell whar from—but jist like a bird out ob de sky—she flewed in—frowed her arms about her fader's neck and kept 'em dar till he died!"

"And—did he—speak kindly to her?" asked the sailor, striving hard to control his emotion.

"Bress you, yes! Dey talked jist like when she war a little gal. He opened his eyes wid Miss Muriel's hair lyin' on his breast, and he didn't see nuffin' but her and she didn't see no one but him, and nobody else said a word. Dey talked and cried and, jist as he died, she had her lips to his'n."

"And what then?" asked the deeply-interested stranger.

"Wal, de gal—dat is Miss Muriel—vanished jist as she come and nobody hain't seen nuffin' ob her since, and don't know whar she am gone!"

"You can go now, Pompey, and here's a dollar for answering my questions. Remember you are to tell no one you met me to-night, or that any one asked the questions you have answered."

"Jist trust me for dat," said Pompey, deftly catching the coin tossed to him, and starting in the direction of The Cedars with the resolve to tell every one whom he encountered for the following month the whole particulars of the interview.

"He's a mighty quar chap," mused the African, as he moved swiftly away. "When I fu'st see'd him, he hadn't any whiskers, den he moved his head round and when he looked back, dar dey war! I neber seen a man's beard grow as fast as dat. Den, when he spoke, his voice sounded like thunder till we war talkin' 'bout Miss Muriel, and den it war as low and soft as bern. If I didn't know dat Burd Bayard war dead, I would 'say dat war him come back from de sea, dough dar war a time when I war sart'in he war de debbil. Mebbe it war Bayard's ghost!" he added with a furtive glance around, "only ghosts don't go to slingin' silver dollars round as dough dey don't cost nuffin', and I'm sure to git lammed ag'in when I got home. Dere ain't no use ob my tellin' de troof for dey won't believe me and I'll hab to gib up tryin' to be good."

CHAPTER II.

DOCTOR HAZELTINE.

FOR a long time after the departure of the negro, the young sailor stood in a thoughtful attitude, holding his heavy cane in a careless grasp, and now and then drawing a long, deep sigh.

"I hardly think Pompey could have recognized me, though I acted like an idiot. I disguised my voice, if I didn't my face. There's one thing certain—nature never meant me for a detective."

"I didn't dream of Colonel Haven dropping off like that," he continued, resuming his walk toward The Cedars. "I thought he was good for twenty years yet. Then he died with Muriel's arms around his neck, with the two whispering words of affection to each other. I always understood the Havens to be a race that never forgave nor forgot. If the colonel relented, he was the first of his kind to do so, but the death-dew was on his brow, when he spoke the loving words."

"I can never go back to the Albatross, till I learn more about this awful business. Ah! that was a dark day, four years ago, when the storm burst over The Cedars! I felt that the shadow could never be lifted from that threshold again."

"Was the shadow lifted? Was all made right in that last moment? No! Too deep a wrong was done for it ever to be made right this side the grave."

"There is only one person besides me, outside of the family, who knows the history of the frightful sorrow which crossed the threshold that night and blighted all, as did the avenging angel that smote the first-born. That person is Doctor Hazeltine, the family physician. He knows all that I do, ay, and more, for he was present at that supreme interview between father and daughter. He can tell me, but will he do so? Dare I trust myself in his presence? Can I preserve my incognito? Will he not spurn me from him?"

As if in answer to his prayer, he observed through the gloom of the night the well-known gig of the physician, who had ministered to the physical ailments of the neighborhood for the last two-score years.

The carriage stood at the side of the road in front of a cottage, and the doctor, having come forth, was untying his horse, preparatory to driving off on his round of visits.

"I'll try it," muttered the young sailor, compressing his lips and walking boldly forward.

"Is this Doctor Hazeltine?" he asked, taking care to disguise his voice.

"It is," was the curt reply of the physician, who continued his attention to his horse.

"I wish to speak to you."

"I know of nothing to prevent it, sir. Let me feel your pulse."

The sailor laughed.

"I don't need your professional services, I am thankful to say. I have just returned from a long voyage and wish to make some inquiries about The Cedars and its late owner."

"I am listening."

"Then it is really true that Colonel Haven is dead?"

"It is; he expired more than six months ago, while celebrating at home with his wife the feast of St. Michael, the Archangel; he was stricken with apoplexy."

"I trust, doctor, that you will pardon my pointed question. Colonel Haven had a daughter, Muriel, and you are aware of the trouble of four years ago. I learned of their estrangement, but have been told that she was with him when he died—that the dark past was forgotten, and that he departed fully reconciled to her. Can you tell me whether such was the fact?"

Doctor Hazeltine drew himself up and replied in his most frigid tones:

"You must take me for a fool to imagine I can be made to reveal the secrets of any of my patients. Good-night, sir."

The young man caught the doctor's arm, as he was in the act of stepping into his gig.

"By heavens! you shall answer me! I have come to you as the only one who can do so, and you shall not refuse me!"

The indignant physician turned around, and, by the aid of the moonlight, peered intently into the disguised face of the sailor.

"That's it!" he exclaimed, straightening up more scornfully than before. "You spoke in your natural tones, then, and although your face has become covered with a mighty beard since I saw you four years ago, yet I know you, Burd Bayard, and my reply to your impertinence is to advise you that if you want to keep your neck out of the halter, you had better put to sea at once, and stay there! There is no call for you to come to these parts. Things are now as they were when you left, and you can make up your mind that they will stay so forever. Good-night again!"

And, stepping into his gig, without interference this time, the doctor gave the reins a sharp

jerk, and went off at a rattling pace down the highway.

"Fool that I am!" bitterly muttered Burd Bayard, looking after the awkward vehicle, as it lumbered down the road and vanished in the gloom of the night; "I have spoken to two persons since leaving Buzzard's Roost, and both of them knew me. It would be the same if I addressed a hundred—so what's the use?"

And, snatching off the luxuriant whiskers, he gave them a spiteful fling that carried them over the fence and out of sight.

He continued his walk in the direction of The Cedars, pausing a few minutes later in front of the old mansion, whose walls, had they tongues, could have told many strange tales of what had taken place there in the years that were gone.

More than once he stopped and gazed longingly at the immense structure, with its wealth of barns, out-buildings, trees, vegetation and servants' quarters, and with forests and meadowland stretching away until the estate inclosed an area of thousands of acres.

But Bayard continued past the famous residence until he had walked fully a mile, when he found himself opposite a large, straggling mansion, made of bricks imported a century before from Holland. The gable end was entirely enveloped in climbing ivy, whose snaky vines clung to the walls as if seeking to strangle them.

Contemplating this gloomy building the young sailor captain observed not the first sign of life within. Everything was as dark and silent as the tomb.

"That is the Haunted House," he mused, as he rested his hand on the ponderous gate, "and it has been a horror for two generations. I remember that it belongs to the estate of The Cedars. The legend is that the whole family were murdered within its walls, and since then the spirits of the victims have haunted the place. I used to dread it and hurry by when I was a child, but I am older to-night, have seen more of the world, and the Haunted House has no terrors now for me."

What had brought Burd Bayard to this dismal place, of which he had no thought when landing from the Albatross? Why had he left the regular highway, and, walking up the short, grass-grown lane, paused in front of the most forbidding of dwellings? Who of us, on a silent moonlight night, could wish to visit a haunted house, so dreaded by those that knew its history, that, for many years, no person could be persuaded to occupy it, nor could servants be induced to till the fertile land or save the out-buildings from moldering and going to ruin?

Captain Bayard had a resistless reason for his step. He believed there was some unexplainable connection between the mystery of The Cedars and that of the Haunted House. He could not even conjecture its precise nature, but a dim, shadowy belief came over him that the knowledge he sought in vain from Doctor Hazeltine awaited him within those gloomy walls.

When the handsome young captain sought to analyze or understand his feeling on this point, he failed, but its presence and controlling force was there none the less.

"God willing, I shall spend this night in the Haunted House," he said, passing through the gate, and slowly approaching the structure; "and if, at the coming of daylight, I shall neither see nor hear nor learn anything that can tell me aught of Muriel, and of the shadow that has brooded over The Cedars so long, then the Albatross shall carry me out on the Atlantic to-morrow morning bound for the other side of the world, and never again shall I set foot in my native country! Of a truth, I cannot understand what strange impulse has brought me here at all to-night."

CHAPTER III.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

THE bravest man that ever trod this footstool cannot approach a "haunted house," where he is alone and the night is calm and still, without being stirred by peculiar emotions.

Captain Bayard walked deliberately forward, purposely kicking the gravel, so as to make all the noise possible without seeming to wish to do so. Not until he stepped upon the rickety porch did he pause long enough to assure himself that his two loaded pistols were in place.

"Shall I knock, or open the door without ceremony?" he asked himself; "however, a man don't lose anything by politeness."

Whatever his emotions, there was no evidence of timidity when he reached up his hand and struck a resounding peal, with the huge brass knocker, and then calmly waited for some response to his summons.

But the listening ear detected not the faintest sound, after the knocking had been repeated several times.

"Very well," he grimly muttered, "if grass won't bring him down we'll see what virtue there is in stones."

Raising the old-fashioned latch, he pressed his shoulder against the heavy door, which yielded no more than if it were the solid brick wall itself.

"I forgot that people as a rule fasten their doors at night," he added, after convincing himself it was useless to expect to enter the Haunted House in the usual way, "but I'm resolved to get in by some means, if I have to break this old door from its hinges."

The sailor stepped softly from the porch and took his place under a dense, spreading oak, within a rod of the house.

"I believe human beings are in there," he added, after the best survey he could make with the partial aid of the moonlight; "I do not see a broken window-pane. They are blue and thin, as though they have stood the storms of a century, but the house wouldn't be in half as good condition, unless some one lived in it."

The keen eyes of the sailor caught a suggestive fact. One gnarled branch of the huge oak, under which he was standing, extended its outer portion so close to an upper window that an ordinarily-expert man could easily reach the latter by such help.

"I'll try it," he muttered, "for I'm on serious business to-night and do not mean to be thwarted."

It could not escape Captain Bayard that the act he was about to attempt involved great personal risk, provided living persons were within the building, for he was assuming the part of a burglar, and every court and jury in the land would hold the occupant guiltless who should shoot such an intruder dead, while forcing an entrance into a house whose door was locked against him.

"I'll take the responsibility," he muttered; "I've been charged with graver crimes than this, and if I'm detected my countrymen will wonder that I didn't do worse."

Leaving his cane on the ground, and making sure his pistols were ready, he went up the tree nimbly and began feeling his way out on the limb toward the window on which he had fixed his hopes.

The exuberant vegetation shut him out from the view of any one who might be peeping out from within the house, and Bayard advanced with the care and caution of an assassin stealing upon his victim.

The large limb bent slightly under his weight, but the deflection was an advantage, inasmuch as it brought him directly opposite the window. In a few minutes he was within reach of the sash.

All remained dark and silent, and wondering whether the sash was secured in place or not he reached forward and tested it. It resisted at first, but suddenly went up the full height, where the warped wood held it securely.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now we shall see what we shall see!"

Grasping the sill with both hands, he rested his knees upon it, and with his head thrust within the building, looked and listened.

Profound stillness and darkness were on every hand. Neither eye nor ear could detect the first evidence that a living being was within the house. Only the faint rustling of the vegetation behind him as the night-wind gently stirred the leaves, told him that he was awake and not dreaming.

Reaching one hand forward and downward, he felt the hard, bare floor, and the next minute he stepped within the Haunted House!

Ay, for the first time in his life he was in the old mansion that had borne the reputation of being haunted for a hundred years.

Burd Bayard stood there, having come from the uttermost parts of the earth, a full-grown man, embrowned in face, hardened in muscle, brave, and not afraid to encounter any peril that could confront him, whose life was made up of peril and all manner of dangers.

Captain Bayard's first act after realizing that he was really within the Haunted House was to make sure again that both his weapons were at instant command. One double-barreled pistol was in his hip-pocket, and the other, somewhat smaller, was in his bosom. Both could be snatched forth at any moment needed.

The next natural move was to feel his way around the room to learn something of his surroundings. The result was the discovery that the apartment was empty of everything except himself. Not a piece of carpet, no chair or table

was on the floor and the walls were bare of pictures and even nails.

While thus playing blind man's buff he came upon the only door leading outward. This readily drew back, and with the same care he had used from the first he groped his way into the broad upper hall, into which the stairs from the lower story led.

The young sailor found the head of the steps without difficulty, and was in the act of descending, when he was startled by the unmistakable sound of footsteps.

They were faint and soft, but his keen sense of hearing, now strained to the highest tension, told him that some one was coming up the steps at the head of which he had halted.

"It is a woman," was his thought, "and she is walking in her slippers."

The captain's first impulse was to withdraw into the room from which he had just come, but, like a truly brave man, he decided to stay where he was, wildly hoping that the mystery that had brought him thither might be on the eve of solution.

Accordingly, he pressed back against the wall and waited and listened for the issue of the strange adventure which seemed at hand.

CHAPTER IV.

A MEMENTO OF THE PAST.

NEARER and nearer came that soft, fairy-like step, his heart fluttering with strange emotions, at the belief that some beautiful girl was approaching, and in a few seconds would be within reach of his hand, as he stood with his back against the wall.

"If she discovers my presence," he thought, when he knew from the sounds that she was near the head of the stairs, "what will take place?"

He held his breath, as she glided still closer, only afraid that the tumultuous beating of his own heart would betray him.

A feeling like a faint, electric shock passed through him, when a rustling, silken dress, cold and smooth, brushed his hands, and he knew that he had but to raise his arm to inclose the body of the mysterious creature in the darkness.

But the faint footfall continued. She had passed and was moving along the hall toward the room he had left a few minutes before.

In that crucial moment, he became aware of a faint, delicious perfume such as had once stolen away his senses in the Orient, and, whether it was fancy or not, he saw a dim, tremulous light that served to blind, rather than to add to his power of vision.

With all his faculties keyed to the highest point, he awoke to the fact that the faint, patter of footfalls were heard no longer.

Where the unknown had gone, he could not conjecture. He had heard no doors opened or shut, and the only sounds besides the footfalls were the "silken, sad, uncertain rustling" of her garments as she seemed to float past.

Perhaps she had paused just beyond arm's reach, where she could hear the slightest movement on his part. This dread held him motionless for several minutes, but the continued stillness convinced him that she had vanished from the upper hall more strangely than she had entered it.

With this belief came back something of his old courage, which for a brief interval had departed. He determined to continue his explorations.

Accordingly, with arms outstretched, he felt his way along the upper hall in the direction whence the unknown lady had disappeared. The floor here was likewise uncarpeted, and, despite all the care he could use, he knew that every step he took could be heard by any person within the house, no matter where located.

In this manner he passed several paces beyond the entrance which admitted him to the hall, when he made another singular discovery. From beneath a door on the other side of the passageway issued several pencils of light, plainly visible to the young captain, who once more halted and listened.

"I'm bound to see this through," he said to himself, as he gently struck his knuckles on the door; "she must have entered here, and my curiosity about her cannot be baffled."

His experience was the same as when he announced his presence by means of the heavy knocker on the outside door. His repeated summons, each time louder than before, brought no response, and with more misgiving than in the former instance, he raised the latch and shoved the door inward.

As he did so, he drew back shamefacedly, for

he saw on the instant that he had invaded the privacy of a lady's chamber!

The one hasty glance cast around the apartment showed the lofty, old-fashioned bedstead, with its towering headboard, dark and quaintly carved; the snowy linen and coverlets; the heavy stand protected by spotless linen, fringed at the borders; a huge trunk, chairs, pictures, dresses and all the various paraphernalia that go to make up a lady's wardrobe, outfit and conveniences, and which left no possible doubt of the sex of the occupant.

Captain Bayard saw also the small lamp burning in the corner, at the instant he closed the door, with the feeling that nothing could justify intrusion on his part, after discovering the unfortunate part he had played.

"I didn't see her," was his thought, "but, whoever she is, she is certainly no more of a disembodied spirit than I am."

A few steps further and the mystified explorer found himself at the head of the stairs, the same broad incline up which the mysterious lady had come.

"My gracious!" he muttered, as he began descending the steps, "my boots make a hundred times more racket than she did."

At the bottom of the stairs, down which he guided himself by means of the smooth balustrade, he again caught the glimmer of light, this time coming from beneath a door on the right of the lower hall.

Without hesitation the sailor shoved this open and passed into the large sitting-room of the Haunted House. It had high ceilings, bare walls, and uncarpeted floor, the only articles of furniture being several plain, high-backed chairs, and a cumbersome lounge that was drawn diagonally in front of the fireplace, as if for the accommodation of some late visitant.

Upon the hearthstone were burning several knots of wood, with a pile at one side for replenishing the blaze, which threw an uncertain flickering light through the room. The latter faced the rear of the house, and had two windows opening out on the desolate stretch of lawn, grown over with gnarled, untrimmed trees, smothered with vines and scrubby undergrowth, all forming as dreary an outlook as can be imagined.

Captain Bayard, standing in the middle of the room with folded arms, took in the strange surroundings.

"This is an adventure," he mused; "and I wonder that my nerves are not more unstrung than they are. I am sure few would stand it as well as I—Helloa!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of a folded piece of paper lying just beneath the lounge. Something startlingly familiar caused him to draw it forth and read:

"\$1,000 REWARD!

Will be given by me for the capture of Burd Bayard, in addition to the same reward offered by the authorities of Maryland. He is believed to be in hiding somewhere in this county, awaiting a favorable opportunity to escape therefrom.

"The said Burd Bayard is about twenty years of age, with clean shaven face, nose slightly aquiline, dark, curling hair, dark eyes, regular teeth, of winning address, and manners, about five feet ten inches in height, very active, powerful and muscular, and when last seen was dressed in black clothing of a fashionable cut.

"All good citizens will aid the cause of justice by helping to apprehend this criminal, guilty of the crime of murder of the most shocking nature. The above reward will be paid by me upon his delivery to the proper authorities, to whomsoever may be entitled to the same, the entire reward awaiting the capture of the criminal being two thousand dollars.

"LLOYD HAVEN."

This was the handbill, embellished with staring capitals and exclamation points which, four years before had been posted through that and the adjoining counties, and which had sent Burd Bayard skulking and dodging and running from his native State, when, but for the help of a few tried friends, he would have suffered capital punishment.

The young man stared at the paper for a minute with curious interest, and then, crumpling it in his hands, flung it into the fire.

"A fugitive for the crime which God knows never so much as entered my thoughts!" he exclaimed bitterly, as he watched the paper blaze and burn, "and yet I was environed in such a network that those whom I trusted told me I could not escape the gallows if caught, so I fled, believing time would make known my innocence

and bring all things right. But the years have come and gone, and that reward still awaits him who captures me. I am running my neck into the halter by coming back to the neighborhood of The Cedars, but who cares?" he suddenly demanded in bitterness of spirit, as he looked defiantly around. "Some one has done me an unpardonable wrong, and sooner or later the truth shall be known. I always believed Colonel Haven knew the secret, and that it was he who lent himself to the crime, but he has gone to judgment and after all he may have been innocent, and some one else moved the diabolical machinery."

CHAPTER V.

SPIRIT TONES.

IN the midst of his bitter thoughts Captain Bayard became aware of a sound overhead, as if made by a person walking back and forth. It was heavier than the steps which first caught his attention, but the noise suddenly ceased, and the same light, fairy footfalls came from the stairs.

"She is coming here—I shall meet her face to face," was his thrilling thought, as he turned toward the door. "I will try to explain and apologize for my rudeness."

He waited until the stranger seemed to have reached a point just outside the entrance, when she paused. Afraid she might escape him again, the sailor stepped quickly forward and pushed open the door.

The light from the hearth lit up the hall, so that every object within it became distinctly visible, but not a living person was in sight!

Bayard was dumfounded, and for the first time a creeping sensation passed over his body from head to foot. The inclination was strong to flee in a panic from the building, but he quickly rallied.

"I set out to stay here all night, and I shall do it."

With the same desperate resolve that had brought him within the Haunted House he threw himself on the lounge, grimly determined that whatever should come should not frighten him from that room. He was well-armed and not afraid to face any possible danger that might threaten him.

As nearly as he could judge in his tumultuous emotions he had lain thus a half-hour, with no sound in his ears but the lonely sighing of the night-wind without and the flicker and rustle of the blaze on the hearth. Unaware to himself, slumber was beginning to steal away his senses, and he was hovering on the border-land of oblivion when he caught the sound of music, so sweet, so heavenly that, fully awakened, he still lay like one in a trance, fearful of stirring, lest he should break the spell and check the angelic strains.

At first they were so faint and airy that he believed they were caused by the wind, which had found a tongue among the spreading branches and climbing ivy, but it was too genuinely musical to be born of any such source as that.

There was a peculiar sinking and rising at first, that suggested a wind-harp suspended overhead, but as he listened he became convinced that it had another source—one that he dared not conjecture.

The feeling that came over the heart of the sailor as he listened to this faint, airy music was that of inexpressible sadness. As soon as the first soft, wavering sound resolved itself into a voice of unapproachable pathos and subtlety of expression, he felt a yearning to lie quiescent until life itself should be wooed from his body.

Then, when the spirit tones were dying out, far in the air above him, tremulous on the verge of utter extinction for a moment, and as the rapt soul was in despair, the music made a sweep downward, like the plunge of a leaping eagle, filling and overpowering the soul with such sweetness that it seemed to the spell-bound sailor that he was losing himself, his consciousness, his identity, his soul in the glory that throbbed to the very center of his being.

Through all this marvelous dallying with the enchanted senses Burd Bayard was sensible of a strange, unaccountable familiarity with the music. Somewhere, in the shadowy past, he had heard something of the same nature; somewhere, something had stirred emotions akin to those which possessed him now. But when and where?

Was it in the silent watches of the night, when, leaning over the gunwale of the Albatross,

as she glided across the moonlit Pacific, impelled by the favoring trade-wind that had waited her for weeks on her voyage, he gazed upon the phosphorescent glimmer of the vasty deep? Was it amid the fruity groves of the Spice Islands where the strange odors caused the senses to swoon, or was it on the dusky plains of India, when listening to the weird music of the native maidens, or when he watched the perfumed lamps floating down the Ganges at eventide? Or was it the dream-like memory of the mother's lullaby that had soothed him to rest in his infancy? Was it the spirit voice of that sainted mother, gone from earth years before, come to cheer his weary soul with the music of the angels?

Never once was he able to detect anything bearing even a remote resemblance to words in these enrapturing strains, which seemed to be not within, though near the house, but floating, sinking, swelling, trembling, dying out far in the air above him, tantalizing the senses, as did the sirens when they lured the navigators to ruin and death.

But now the music was coming closer! It grew more and more powerful, never once losing its ravishing, tremulous, soul-possession nature until when it seemingly had entered the room, it stopped!

As it did so, Burd Bayard sprang upright, quivering in every limb.

He had solved the myseery! Memory had told him when and where that same music had enchanted him in the years gone by. Ay, he knew it! he knew it! The whole marvelous truth had burst upon him like the overwhelming avalanche.

"Muriel! Muriel! will you not come to me?" he wailed, stretching forth his arms into the empty air. "I have returned to you from the other side of the world; let me unfold you to my heart as I did in the past."

In his yearning, imploring sorrow, he expected his loved and lost to rush to his embrace; but the gloom gave no token and he staggered back like a drunken man ready to sink unconscious to the floor.

A new terror was at his heart. Brave and practical as he was, he had been fearfully tried by the events of the night, and he found despite all his reasoning and self-argument, that there is none of us who has not somewhere down in his heart a chord, which if swept by the proper hand, yields a responsive tone to the supernatural.

"The servant said she was not seen after the funeral of her father," he murmured, standing with his back to the fire, and looking gloomily through the open door into the dark hall beyond. "Then she must be dead—goe from the earth months ago—and it was her spirit floating in the air around me that answered to the yearnings of my soul. Why should I stay here longer—"

He paused, for at that moment a slight noise at one of the windows caught his attention, and turning his head, he saw—

What?

CHAPTER VI.

"ONE—TWO—THREE!"

STANDING within the large room in the Haunted House, with his back to the blazing wood on the hearth, Captain Burd Bayard turned his glance toward one of the windows where he had heard a slight noise.

As he did so he saw a tall, shadowy form, bearing some resemblance to the human figure, but of a gigantic height and a dim, misty appearance suggestive of the mysterious, the terrible.

It was not in the apartment but outside, staring through the window at this daring intruder of the Haunted House. No sound came from it, nor could anything more than the irregular outline of the figure be distinguished. The head appeared to be hooded, with a cloak gathered about and shrouding the shoulders, the arms and face either hid entirely from view or too dimly lighted by the smoldering fire to be discernible. The head of this Thing was near the top of the upper sash, so that, allowing for the height of the window from the ground, it must have been far taller than the tallest human being.

This apparition, greeting Captain Bayard at the moment his nerves were so highly wrought, caused him to recoil with an awe-struck feeling and instinctively to look around for some way of escape.

But on the point of leaping toward the door he rallied, and he scanned the Thing with a

curiosity akin to that of Doctor Hazeltine earlier in the evening.

"I have heard a good deal," said the captain, laying his hand on the pistol at his hip; "and it is now time I saw something. There it is, sure enough!"

Stirring the fire with his foot, he filled the room with a brighter glow, but found when looking toward the figure that it had gained nothing more than an additional distinctness of outline.

Up to this moment it was motionless, as if it were a picture of the night painted against the window-panes; but the sailor now observed something like a movement on the part of the hooded figure as if it were trying vainly to lift its arm beneath the cloak. The vague motion continued until the right arm was freed from the strangling folds, and then the gesture became a warning one, consisting of a slow, waving motion made by raising and lowering the arm several times.

Bayard did not know, nor did he care, what meaning the apparition was seeking to convey. He felt in an ugly mood, and, but for the dread of killing some miserable fool who was trying to play upon his fears, he would have sent the contents of his pistol into the figure.

"I'll give him warning," he concluded consciously of a deepening of his own resentment; "and, if he don't heed it, he must take the consequences and it will be his own fault."

The captain was an admirable pistol-shot, and, at that distance could plant nineteen bullets out of twenty into a space an inch square. He knew the Thing was at his mercy.

Leveling his larger weapon, he said: "I'll give you just one minute to leave, and, if you don't, I'll put a bullet through you."

The form became as motionless as himself.

"I give you warning," added the captain, "if you don't depart before I count three, I'll fire."

All this time the arm of the sailor was extended, pointing like the finger of fate straight at the apparition, which was as motionless as the weapon itself.

Captain Bayard proved his deadly earnestness the next moment.

"One! Two! Three!"

The last word was hardly uttered, when crack went the pistol, and the jingle of glass left no doubt whither the bullet had gone.

The sailor looked to see an upthrowing of the arms, to hear the appalling shriek, as the shrouded figure threw itself, dying, to the ground; but it stood as immovable as the trunk of the oak a few paces beyond, and with the fractured window-pane showing that the bullet had pierced the glass exactly in front of where the face had been.

"I hit it!" whispered Bayard to himself, "but it is unharmed! It must be that disembodied spirits do return to earth! This house is haunted! The crime that stained its walls was too dreadful to allow itself to be forgotten! Ah—"

The apparition was now seen to be oscillating again, but slowly sinking downward, as if about to disappear into the earth.

The sailor kept his eyes riveted on it, until the head had passed below the line of sight, when he dashed forward and threw up the sash.

It was gone as utterly, as though it never existed! But where, he could not guess. It had sunk downward, but below the captain's eyes there was nothing, so far as he could judge, that could conceal anything of that nature.

"Never was my hand steadier nor my aim truer," said the sailor, "and the Thing was hit fairly yet was not harmed."

He walked moodily back to the fire, reloading the barrel, so that he had three shots at his command, and then debated with himself what was the best thing to do.

The burning embers behind him fell apart, and the wind moaned and sighed outside, but the wondrous music had long since ceased.

"I wonder, whether it has left for good, or will it make another call—"

Could he believe his senses?

There stood the ghostly visitant, just as he had seen it a short time before, but it was now in front of the other window. It was swaying more violently than at the first appearance, with a waltz like movement, as if seeking to tantalize the spectator, who began to feel an emotion akin to genuine fear.

"I'll try it again!" he muttered, bringing his weapon to a level, "and I'll give it the benefit of a warning the same as before."

It was one! two! three! and the bang and jingle of glass, with the certainty that the bullet had sped straight to its mark. The oscillat-

ing movement lasted a minute or two and then the phantom seemed this time to float off and upward in the air, vanishing like a feather borne by a strong wind.

Captain Bayard stood awhile, with smoking pistol in hand, staring at the second window-sash, as if striving to make sure whether he was dreaming or awake.

He had surely seen enough to unnerve the bravest man that ever confronted danger. He had expected, when he entered the upper window of the Haunted House, to undergo some singular experiences, but he never thought it possible that anything like this could take place.

He had set out with the strange resolve to penetrate the mystery of a hundred years and had been baffled at every point. At the very moment when, assured in his own heart that he had solved the wonderful secret, he was confronted by a new danger which laughed him to scorn.

It was a danger, too, which he felt himself unequal to face. He had been met and conquered.

"That man is a madman who fights against fate," he concluded, seizing his hat from the lounge, and shoving the half-discharged pistol back in his pocket. Then, throwing up the window, he leaped out upon the ground, and, without pausing to recover his heavy cane, or so much as to look behind him, hurried off, heedless of the direction he was pursuing.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

As might be expected, when Captain Bayard left the Haunted House in such blind haste, he took the wrong course. Every step led him further from the main highway, which he meant to follow to Buzzard's Roost, thence to sail for some distant port, never to return to his native land again.

Not until he found himself on the border of an extensive and deep wood, did he pause and look around him. The air had grown cooler, and something of his old assurance came back to him.

"I wonder where I am?" he mused, looking about and striving in vain to recognize some familiar landmark. "When I was a boy, it would have been impossible to lose me within twenty miles of Buzzard's Roost, but I believe I'm beyond soundings now."

"However," he added, "I can't be so far lost that I won't find my way back pretty soon. I told the boys to wait for me at the tavern, and by this time they are in such a condition that I'll have hard work getting them to the schooner."

The gloomy seafarer was walking slowly along, when he emerged into a small clearing, large enough, however, to be lit up by the light of the moon. As he naturally paused, he observed that a figure on the other side had also halted, and doubtless from the same cause—the sight of a stranger.

With an astonishment which perhaps may be imagined, he recognized the other as a young lady, who was coming directly toward him.

She was attired in a light, fleecy dress, with a white shawl drawn about her shoulders and no covering for her head. The hair, fine, silken and extraordinarily luxuriant, descended far below her waist, spreading out and inclosing her figure like an Astrachan robe, while the pale and wonderfully beautiful face startled Captain Bayard, who half suspected that one of the spirits from the Haunted House had followed him into the wood.

Perhaps a dozen feet separated the young persons when they recognized each other at the same moment.

In a low, tremulous voice he pronounced the name:

"Muriel!"

For one instant she looked at him without speaking, and then a strange quivering seized her slight frame. She covered her face with her hands and seemed on the point of sinking to the earth, when he sprang forward in time to save her. He gently drew the small white hands from before the countenance and gazed at the marvel of beauty, while she, raising her eyes, tremulous with love and melting with affection and sorrow, asked:

"Oh, Burd! have you come back from the grave—at last—at last!"

And yet, though their lips had met hundreds of times, and though his head, almost touched hers, he simply held her in his arms, both weighed down by a grief such as few mortals are called upon to bear.

"I heard you call me," she said, "but they

would not let me go to you; but I watched and saw which way you went and followed you."

"And who are 'they' that you speak of?" asked Captain Bayard.

She shuddered as she answered:

"Don't ask me again; I cannot tell you."

"I will not, dearest; think no more about it, but tell me why you followed my footsteps."

"Because I heard you call me; why did you do so?"

"I can hardly tell; my experience in that house is like some wild dream; I thought it was your spirit that had returned to me."

"Tell me, Burd, where you have been all those long years since you went away."

"On that dreadful night when I fled like a hare before the hounds, a few friends stood by me and helped me out of the country. You know I had been on the sea before, and my skill was of great assistance to me. I got along so well that more than a year ago I was given command of the Albatross. I thought when I left in such haste that I never would want to set eyes on Buzzard's Roost again, for I have no living relatives; but the desire to learn something about the people, and especially about you, led me to thrust my neck into the halter again."

"And when did you come?" she asked, raising those wonderful eyes of hers and looking him straight in the face.

"I sailed up the Chesapeake yesterday, and anchored off Buzzard's Roost a short time before sunset. On my way, I met Pompey, the servant, and Dr. Hazeltine, from whom I learned that Colonel Haven had been dead more than six months."

"Yes," replied Muriel, "he died with his arms around my neck and whispering words of love in my ear."

"Then all was forgotten and—forgiven?"

"I am not so sure," she replied with singular calmness. "A part of the time his mind wandered and he appeared to forget about the trouble, and believed that he and I were as we were before it came upon us. I strove to recall it to him, for I could not bear to have him depart with any feeling of harshness in his heart toward me; but the years were forgotten and he called me 'Baby Muriel,' just as he used to do when I was a little child and he held me on his knee. He thought I had come to him for my embrace and good-night, as I always did until that trouble."

The maiden's own sentences recalled so vividly that last scene of all that she was overcome and unable to speak for some minutes. Captain Bayard still held her in his arms, and he uttered soothing words until she became herself again.

"Forgive me, Muriel, but I am anxious to know all. Was there no time during his dying moments when he mentioned the trouble between us? Did he make no reference to me?"

"Yes; a few seconds of light seemed to glimmer on him and he pronounced your name, but alas! it was with no feeling of forgiveness, and I cannot help thinking that, had his mind remained clear, he would have spurned me also from him."

"You are wrong," urged the captain, anxious to remove this dreadful doubt from the heart of the daughter; "it was his affection for you that could be restrained no longer. Let no such mistake enter your thoughts. But," added the young man, in a sterner voice, as he gently released the willowy form, "as it is, I have no right to hold you in such fond embrace. I had hoped, in spite of Dr. Hazeltine's hard words, that all might have been made clear to Colonel Haven before he departed, and that he had withdrawn his harsh condemnation of an innocent man. It has been said that the last minutes of a person's life are sometimes divinely illuminated, that the mists clear from his vision and he is permitted to see things as they are, but Colonel Haven died with his mind clouded or—"

Captain Bayard hesitated to utter the bitter words in his soul. He rebelled against the great wrong he had suffered, but he must spare the stricken child, who stood looking at him with the same frightful calmness of face and manner she had displayed during most of this strange interview. This unnatural quiet alarmed the lover, who resolutely forced back the hot words struggling for utterance. Then she spoke:

"He believed you guilty; mother believed you guilty, but I never for a second suspected you; is not that enough?"

"No," he replied fiercely; "what avail is that to me? You have held the same faith always, but the insurmountable barrier remains. It is an impassable gulf!" he added, pointing to the ground between them.

The sailor breathed fast and hard. With flashing eyes and heaving chest, he struck his forehead.

"Oh, God, am I always to be an Ishmael, with every man's hand against me? Are those who have crushed me to the earth to be allowed to keep me forever in torture and disgrace? Will Heaven always withhold the avenging hand?"

And he looked up at the cloudless sky, with its pale moon gazing down, as it seemed, with something like reproof at the blasphemous thoughts of the smitten man.

Then, as he turned and his eyes rested on the bowed form before him, a gentler feeling stole into his heart.

"Forgive if you can, Muriel, my harsh and reckless words."

She was silent a moment and then looked up, her countenance unnaturally pale and calm, and without a tear in the lustrous eyes.

"If I have anything to forgive, it is forgiven. When you left me, in the night, I knew of few besides myself who did not believe your guilt. Never doubting, I resolved not to rest until the whole dark mystery was cleared up and you were justified before the world. For a year I scarcely paused; then there came another calamity, whose memory makes me shudder, for it came to me—to me!" she whispered, with a wild, terrified look. "I fought against it, and prayed a merciful Heaven to turn it aside, but God willed otherwise!"

Captain Bayard was startled and begged her to desist.

"Say no more—say no more. Too much has already been said! I understand your reference and want no other explanation. I can never blame you so much as in thought. The night is waning; let us leave this spot!"

They walked a few minutes in silence, her arm resting in his, while she instinctively acted as the guide for him who had wandered from the right course.

Captain Bayard's lips were compressed, and a hard resolution was forming in his heart.

"We must part forever," he said, with superhuman calmness. "I have learned from your own lips that your mother holds the same belief that your father carried into the grave. The chasm can never be closed in this world. I shall strive to lead such a life that we shall be reunited beyond the stars. My spirit has often revolted, but that is past. The ways of Providence are beyond our ken, but no murmur shall be heard from me."

Muriel Haven seemed on the point of saying something, but, with a courage which few of her sex possessed, she refrained. Reaching a narrow path, he took the lead, with her walking close behind him.

"I must bid her farewell," he reflected, as he walked slowly forward, "and for the last time touch my lips to hers."

Reaching the end of the path, at the border of the wood, he turned to offer his arm.

But she had vanished!

CHAPTER VIII.

"I SURRENDER!"

CAPTAIN BURD BAYARD waited several minutes, hoping that Muriel, wrapped in deep thought, might have fallen unconsciously behind, but he soon became convinced that she had fled, doubtless impelled to do so through a wish to escape the last painful parting.

"She did well," he reflected, resuming his moody walk, now that he had located himself, and knew the right course to take to reach the highway to Buzzard's Roost. "There was no call for more words. The great obstacle to our union can never be removed. I took care to make no hint to her of another cause, for it would have broken her gentle heart, and I pray she may never suspect it."

Ah, but the sweet Muriel Haven had not only suspected, but she knew the truth from the first!

"Well," added the young sailor captain, rousing himself and looking around, "they must be expecting me on the Albatross."

As he moved across the field, he observed that the night was nearly at an end. The dismal Haunted House loomed through the early morning mists, and it was hard, even then, to recall his remarkable experience within its walls without believing the events were only some grisly phantasmagoria of the overwrought brain. But he resolutely shut out all speculation of the mysteries, knowing they were beyond his knowledge, and doubtless would always remain so.

Fixing his thoughts on the Albatross and the duties awaiting him there, he strode rapidly for-

ward, until he came to a familiar point where two roads met. There the first object on which his eyes rested was another of those flaming posters headed:

"\$1,000 REWARD!"

"What does that mean?" he exclaimed, with a recoil of wrathful resentment. "That was printed four years ago. It must have been put up since I came to Buzzard's Roost last night!"

Assured on this point, Captain Bayard now gave his thoughts to the personal peril that threatened him—a peril not only of the most serious nature, but one that was deepening every minute.

He reflected that a dozen hours had passed since his meeting with Doctor Hazeltine—time sufficient for the irate physician to set the machinery of the law in motion. Pompey may have recognized him, and, though he was a friend, yet he was not bright-witted, and may have betrayed the secret without thought of the grave consequences to him.

He had no wish to stand trial when, according to every earthly possibility, he was sure of conviction and a disgraceful death. He felt it his duty to take every precaution against capture.

As he walked along the road, therefore, in the gray of the early morning, he was on the alert for enemies. Filled with misgiving, he came opposite to the old mansion known as The Cedars; but, without pausing, he hurried forward to be confronted by another of the terrible posters, with its caption, "1,000 REWARD!" which had sent him skurrying out of the neighborhood years before.

"This is getting more serious than I suspected," he muttered, hesitating whether to take to the fields and woods again.

The hand-bill seemed to grin at him like a demon.

"My foes are busy," he added, grinding his teeth, "but I am not yet taken."

At that instant a man leaped over the fence beside him, and stopping short with a startled glance, the captain placed his hand on the pistol at his hip.

But it was Pompey, the negro, whose sable face was the picture of distress.

"Oh, Massa Bayard, will you forgib me?" he moaned, ready to sink to the earth.

"Forgive you for what?" demanded the sailor, suspecting the cause of the negro's emotion.

"Indeed I didn't mean it! I didn't t'ink ob it! Will you please forgib me?"

"How can I forgive you unless you tell me what you mean? Out with it, Pompey."

"Wal, de way ob it war dis way: when I met you last night I wouldn't hab knowed you, if it warn't dat you had your whiskers off at fu'st, den you done forgot and spoke like yourself; den I knewed dat it war you. When I got home and see'd some ob de boys, I kinder forgot myself and ac'dent'ly let it drop dat I had see'd yerself. And dar war Pete—he just slid out, and I didn't t'ink what he war arter till he war gone, and I started to head him off; but he war too fur from de house fur me to catch him till I see'd him talkin' wid Doctor Hazeltine, and den I knowed it war all up. I war so mad at myself fur lettin' out de secret dat I kicked myself all de way back to de house. I spent all night lookin' fur yer, so dat I might tell yer, but I didn't coteh sight ob yer till dis blessed minute, and, oh, Massa Bayard, you must run—and do you forgib me?"

"Certainly, Pompey; you meant no wrong, and here's another dollar for your kindness."

The negro caught the coin tossed to him, and his tears gave way to smiles as he turned about, muttering:

"If anybody axes me 'bout you, I'll tell him he's a liar and frow stones at him, and don't forget to hurry, Masser Bayard."

Bidding the servant good-by, the sailor resumed his walk down the highway in the direction of Buzzard's Roost, the conviction strong upon him that he would be unable to reach the little town without trouble.

"There's one thing certain," he said, to himself, "it won't do for me to keep in the main road, for there's just where they will be hunting for me. It won't do, either, to make my way back to the Albatross, unless I do so secretly, for they will be watching her. If I could only get word to Mate Simmons and have him drop down the bay several miles and wait till dark it would be easy enough to manage it, but it will be as hard to effect an understanding with him as to escape, unless I should run against one of the boys."

But the only place to meet a member of his crew was at the tavern in Buzzard's Roost, and, to go there, would be to walk into the lion's den. He decided, therefore, to continue down the highway a short distance further, since no persons were in sight, and then to make his way to the shore at a point below the little county town.

If unable to communicate by signal with his vessel, he would wait until night and then swim out to it. It was not likely the officers of the law had as yet boarded the craft, and he would keep close enough watch to discover any such action.

In the event of the officers visiting the Albatross, of course he would take good care to give the schooner a wide berth and rely on other means to get out of the country.

Accordingly, he kept his course for a quarter of a mile further, when he found himself close to a small stretch of woods. The sound of hoofs caused him to dart among the trees, where he peeped furtively out at a couple of horsemen, as they rode by on a walk.

"They are looking for me," was his thought, "and the hunt will be a hot one."

Unfortunately the woods, as has been stated, were of moderate extent, and he had not gone far when he emerged into an open meadow, where he paused to make sure of his bearings.

Standing thus, he was on the point of moving forward, once more, when there was a sudden crackling and thrashing of the undergrowth, and fully a dozen men, all armed with loaded guns, seemed to spring from the very earth.

"I guess you're the chap we're looking for," called out the leader, leveling his rifle; "throw up your hands!"

"I surrender," answered Bayard, seeing all hope was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

COUNSELOR AND CLIENT.

CAPTAIN BAYARD wondered at his own tame submission when summoned to surrender. A few minutes before he was filled with an angry resentment which would have insured a fight to the death before yielding; but at the moment of the summons, a relapse came over him, and he felt as though, having vainly battled fate so long, it was useless to struggle further.

He was safely lodged in the county jail at Buzzard's Roost, and his captors received the full amount of the reward offered, the widow of Colonel Haven paying her portion with an alacrity that would have added wormwood to the bitter cup of the prisoner could he have seen the act.

When word reached Mate Simmons of what had taken place, the anchor of the Albatross was hoisted, sail spread, and the sober citizens of Buzzard's Roost drew a breath of relief, thanking fortune that they were rid of a set of men who doubtless were pirates that had stained their hands in the blood of scores of innocent persons.

"After his flight some years ago," said the delighted Dr. Hazeltine, while recounting the part he had taken in the capture, to the attentive and pleased Widow Haven, "word came back that he had been drowned in a distant sea. But I never believed it, for you know the saying that the man who is born to be hanged will never be drowned, and I was sure he would turn up here again sooner or later. I kept a good lot of the colonel's handbills to post up, whenever the wretch's fate should lead him hither. Justice is now sure to be done, for he is safe within the county jail."

"When will his trial take place?"

"Court sits next week, and I understand his trial will be among the first. There is no earthly doubt of the result."

"Do you know whether he has engaged counsel?"

"Yes," said the physician, frigidly; "I am ashamed to say that my son has offered his services."

And yet, despite the words of the old doctor, it was plain that no man was prouder of a son than he was of that brilliant boy of his, who was admitted to the bar barely three years before, and who had already made a reputation that was known from one end of the State to the other.

The doctor wanted Burd Bayard hanged, and yet, if that bright youth of his should prove smart enough to save his neck, the father, away down in his heart, would be the proudest parent in all Maryland.

Like a burst of sunshine came Fred Hazeltine into the gloomy cell of the despairing Burd Bayard. There was no resisting the contagion of the handsome fellow's presence. He nearly tumbled over the turnkey in his eagerness to greet the friend whom (unknown to Doctor Hazeltine) he had done so much to help out of the country, four years before, when hounded by the officers of the law.

"How are you, Burd, my old boy?" he exclaimed, slapping him on the shoulder and then wringing his hand; "I was at Annapolis when I heard you were in limbo; you owe me for a horse that I rode clean to death so as to get here in time. Why don't you tell me how you are, old fellow?"

"God bless you!" replied Captain Bayard, with tears in his eyes, as he held up his manacled hands; "I didn't expect this."

"What's the reason you didn't? What sort of a fellow do you take me for?"

Then turning to the turnkey, he told him he wished to be left alone with his client for an hour. When the sluggish official was beyond hearing, the young lawyer turned to his friend, and his cheery way said:

"Now to business. Your trial will be called within a fortnight, unless you want it postponed in order to hunt up witnesses. I will spend an hour or two each day with you, and will work heart and soul to secure your acquittal."

"You won't succeed," said Captain Bayard, looking quietly in the face of his friend.

"I won't if I don't show more pluck than you, but I'm in this business to win. Let's run over the matter. To begin at the beginning, four years ago last month, Colonel Haven's overseer and his wife were found murdered in their beds. The house, standing within a mile of The Cedars, was robbed of a large amount of money, the proceeds of a big tobacco sale in Baltimore. Kirke Warman, the overseer, was a harsh taskmaster, and suspicion pointed to the slaves. A careful examination of the premises, however, not only proved the innocence of the servants, but showed that the terrible crime was committed by a white man.

"It was also discovered that an attempt had been made to fire the place, for the purpose of hiding all traces of the crime, but the assassin was scared off before he could complete his work. While the investigation was under way, two negroes of Colonel Haven declared they had stolen away to Buzzard's Roost that night without a permit from the overseer, and were coming back about midnight, when they recognized your black stallion standing in front of the overseer's house. With a curiosity natural in such people, they hid themselves near, and waited to learn what it meant. You shortly after made your appearance, mounted your horse and rode away. They were about to resume their return to quarters, when the sight of smoke coming from the house caused them to rush in and help put out the flames. They succeeded in doing so with great difficulty. They saw nothing of the dead bodies, and supposed that the overseer and his wife were absent from home.

"The names of these two negroes were Pompey and Pete, who, without thought of involving you, told the story, which was afterward proven true in every particular. They said, in addition, that, while you were mounting your horse, some man whom they did not know, but who carried a heavy cane, passed and saluted you. You returned the salutation, but they did not catch the name.

"At the inquest, this man voluntarily came forward and asserted that what the negroes said was strictly true. He stated that the moon was shining so brightly that he recognized you beyond all possibility of mistake. His name was Josiah Brigham, a resident of Buzzard's Roost, who had known you from childhood, and who has the reputation of being one of the most conscientious men in the country. He gave his testimony with great emotion.

"The negroes' uncorroborated story, as you know, would have done you little harm, but it was what Mr. Brigham told, confirmed by what followed. Suspicion pointed so strongly to you that you were arrested, in bed at the Golden Boar Tavern. There was blood on your hands and clothing, and a large sum of money in your possession. Your confusion and contradictory explanations removed all doubts of guilt, except on the part of a few of your devoted friends, among whom of course was myself.

"Colonel Haven became a volcano of wrath, because you were engaged in marriage to his daughter. He would have favored lynching you, and swore that he would spend his entire fortune in bringing you to justice. I was hope-

ful that if the trial could be delayed until the excitement calmed down, or if a change of venue could be secured, a way might open to establish your innocence despite the awful proof against you.

"But matters looked so bad that a few of us helped you to escape, Pompey being one of the number. He has managed to keep the secret through fear that, if it should be discovered, he would be hanged in your place.

"Well, all that was four years ago, and you got safely away, only to come back and allow yourself to be arrested. Have I given the narrative correctly?"

"Without the slightest error. What is your conclusion, Fred?"

"I do not see the first ray of hope."

CHAPTER X.

"P. L. M."

CAPTAIN BURD BAYARD stared at the young counselor in amazement.

"You tell me there is not a ray of hope, and yet insist on making a fight for me? I do not understand such logic."

Fred Hazeltine made the cell ring with his merry laughter.

"Don't be in such a hurry to jump to conclusions. I repeat what I said, that, as matters stand, I see no hope at all, but I believe we shall both see it before long. I assure you, on my honor, that I believe some way will open for clearing up this mystery, and of saving a man who is as innocent of that particular crime as I am."

"I want to know, Fred, whether you believe fully, unreservedly, unshakenly, in my innocence."

"Never have I had a moment's doubt, my dear fellow!"

Captain Bayard extended his hand, saying in a broken voice:

"That is worth a good deal. I thank you from my very soul! Your faith has renewed the prayer for life within me."

"You shall come from the furnace without the smell of fire on your garments, and then shall you be happy with Muriel Haven, the most beautiful and lovely maid in all Maryland—an angel on earth, Burd, if anything human can be angelic."

Burd Bayard shook his head.

"Had Colonel Haven been spared to see my vindication, it might be, but he died without recalling the prohibition he uttered long before."

"Did it have no condition?"

"None, and with that prohibition hanging over us, his daughter can never become my wife."

Fred Hazeltine sprang up and paced rapidly back and forth across the narrow cell. A new suspicion and a new train of thought had taken shape in his mind, caused by the last remark of his friend. But the hour had not yet come to name it.

He resumed his seat.

"Let us keep to the point, Burd. You will see that the case could not be much stronger against you."

"So strong, indeed, that to me it is hopeless."

"Not so bad as that, by any means. Now, old fellow, I want you to give me your version of that woful night. I must have everything fixed so clearly in my mind that there is no room for the slightest error."

"Well," said the prisoner, with a sigh, "my story is a brief one. On that night I rode along the road toward Buzzard's Roost at a later hour than usual. My horse was on a slow walk, the moon was shining brightly, and at the moment I came opposite the overseer's house I thought I heard a groan. My stallion showed some uneasiness, and, thinking help might be needed, I dismounted, tied him at the gate and knocked at the door. There was no answer, and all was still. I was about to leave, when I decided to look further, and, lifting the latch, entered."

"Everything was dark, and, though I spent some time in groping round the room, I was unable to find a light. I called the name of Warman several times, but, after tumbling about for a while, I concluded I had made a mistake and came out, believing the overseer and his wife were away from home."

"As I remounted my horse, Josiah Brigham came along, precisely as he testified, and bade me good-evening. The negroes being in hiding, I saw nothing of them. I galloped back to the Golden Boar, at Buzzard's Roost, turned my horse over to the hostler, and went to bed in the dark."

"I felt so ill next morning that I didn't rise,

and was in bed when arrested. Then, for the first time, I noticed the blood on my hands and clothing. It must have got there while I was groping around the room of the overseer, in the dark. You tell me there was evidence of a fearful struggle in the house, and blood seemed to be everywhere."

"I was astounded, perhaps more than my accusers, and I have no doubt that, in the excitement of the moment, I deepened suspicion by my replies to many of their questions. The several hundred dollars which was found on me was my own. I often had larger amounts than that, and I was contemplating a trip to Philadelphia. But that, too, was a link in the chain of evidence which seemed too strong for human skill to break."

"Now, Burd, give me your theory."

"I really have none that amounts to anything. Like many others, I supposed at first the crime was committed by negroes. The overseer and his wife were both killed by pistol shot wounds, and though no weapon was found on me, yet all saw the chance I had of getting rid of any such telltale evidence, and that fact, therefore, weighed nothing in my behalf. The deed must have been done by some skillful villain who has kept his secret too well."

"Well, good-by; I will see you again tomorrow."

Fred Hazeltine, as he declared, had entered into this business heart and soul, and as he mounted his horse and rode away from the jail, his mind was full of it.

"Where shall I look for the key?" he asked himself; "it must be within reach, if I only knew where to hunt for it. I will go to the house of the present overseer. Possibly he has picked up some clew, for he has lived in the house several years."

It was only a short ride to the house of Mr. Merriweather, the successor of the murdered Warman. As the young lawyer approached he saw the man for whom he was looking come from the house, as though he had just concluded his midday meal.

After a few preliminary words, young Hazeltine came to the point.

"You tell me, Mr. Merriweather, that you have lived here about three years. During that time, of course, you have ransacked the place from top to bottom."

"I should think so," replied the overseer, with a grin, "being that I have the help of nine children in doing the same thing."

"I am the counsel of Captain Burd Bayard, who is accused of the murder of your predecessor. He is innocent, and the real criminal is still at large. I am in search of evidence. I want to learn whether you or any member of your family have come upon anything, no matter how trifling, that has a bearing upon this business. Think hard."

"No, I believe not," replied the overseer, taking off his hat and scratching his head, like a man in perplexity; "but hold on! I remember now that one of my children was playing in the back yard and found a pistol, an old double-barreled one, that must have lain there a good time, for it was very rusty."

"What did you do with it?"

"I laid it away on the shelf, and I guess it's there yet."

"Be kind enough to let me see it."

Mr. Merriweather was absent only a minute, when he reappeared bearing the weapon in his hand.

"There it is; it was so long ago that I had almost forgotten it."

Fred Hazeltine's heart gave a quick throb as he took the old pistol in hand and carefully examined it.

"That is the weapon which killed Mr. Warman and his wife," said the young lawyer. "Both barrels are empty. As Burd Bayard came out of the front door, the murderer passed out the rear and dropped this in his flight."

Then, turning to the gaping overseer, he asked:

"Am I the only person who has made inquiry for this?"

"Yes, sir; nobody has known that I had it."

"Very well; let no living person know anything about it. So long a time has passed that your children have forgotten it, and a word to your wife will be sufficient."

"You are welcome to the pistol, and you needn't have any fear about that," assured Mr. Merriweather, whose faith in the discretion of his wife evidently was unbounded.

Thanking the overseer for his courtesy, Fred bade him good-day and turned his horse in the direction of Buzzard's Roost.

"I believe Providence is directing my steps," he said; "I am sure Burd never owned that weapon. Now that no one is watching me, I will examine it more closely."

The pistol was small, silver-mounted, the stock elaborately carved, and, though rusty from its long exposure to the elements, the flint was in good condition, so that, when he pulled back the claw-like hammer and pressed the trigger, it gave out a sharp spark, sufficient to ignite any powder in the pan.

"Some memento of Revolutionary days, and there's no saying what good service it may have done in the struggle for liberty, before prostituted to its last misuse—Helloa!"

On the finger-guard he traced three letters as distinctly as if he had carved them there himself. They were "P. L. M."

CHAPTER XI.

OLD FRIENDS.

It need not be said that Fred Hazeltine was startled, and naturally placed a value on the discovery just made that was lessened by a few minutes' reflection.

"I cannot think of any person with the initials P. L. M.," he said, after racking his brains over the matter; "and, after all, those letters may have been placed there with the intent to deceive; or if they stand for the owner's name, perhaps the property was stolen from him by the real criminal. But they have a value of their own nevertheless," he added, carefully shoving the weapon out of sight of any one whom he might encounter on the way.

He had hardly done so when he caught sight of his father's familiar gig bobbing up the road toward him. The two stopped, as a matter of course, and the greeting was an affectionate one.

"You know the business that has brought me down from my office at Annapolis?" remarked the son, with a quizzical look.

"Yes, I heard you were Captain Bayard's counsel. You have a hard task before you, as any man must have who fights justice."

"We won't discuss it here, father," replied Fred, with a smile. "I expect to be up home with you and mother for a few days, while pushing my investigations. I believe you conducted the post-mortem, father, four years ago?"

"I did."

"And you found a pistol-bullet in the body of Mr. Warman, and another in that of his wife?"

"You are right."

"What became of those bullets?"

"They are in my office, on the topmost shelf, behind a jar of alcohol."

"I should like to have them."

"Help yourself; I won't be home for a couple of hours, and no doubt you can find them without trouble."

After a few more words, father and son separated, the latter hurrying to the home of his boyhood, where, as may be supposed, he received a warm welcome from his mother. Without any appearance of expectation or excitement, Fred made his way to his father's office some time later.

The bullets were found precisely where he expected to find them, each containing a small cross cut on it, the same being the mark placed there for identification by the physician.

The son tried the bullets in the barrels of the old pistol, and they fitted perfectly.

"That settles that matter," he said, with a sigh, "there can be not the slightest doubt that these bullets caused the death of the overseer and his wife, and were discharged from this pistol. Who fired the pistol? That's the question, and until I can find out the identity of 'P. L. M.,' there is little chance of discovering the guilty one."

Fred decided to withhold all knowledge of the recovery of the pistol from his father. The old gentleman believed thoroughly in the guilt of the young man, and, although no man knew better how to keep a secret than he, yet there was nothing to be gained by making him a confidant at this stage of the peculiarly delicate business.

But that evening he questioned both his parents as to their knowledge of persons in the neighborhood whose Christian names began with the letter M. Such an old physician as Doctor Hazeltine possessed an intimate knowledge of all the families for a radius of a score of miles. There were plenty whose names began with the letter "M," but, singularly enough, not one could be thought of whose first initials were "P. L.," or, indeed,

which contained either of the letters. To the others mentioned, it was impossible to attach any suspicion.

As the afternoon was only partly gone, Fred decided to ride to Buzzard's Roost and make another call on Captain Burd Bayard. He had concluded to visit his office in Annapolis on the morrow; and, since the distance was considerable, and he meant to ride his own horse, with the probability of being absent a couple of days, he thought it wise to hold a consultation with his friend, to whom he wished to reveal the discoveries made during the day.

The young man certainly had learned enough to keep his thoughts busy, and he therefore failed to note an individual who suddenly appeared at the roadside, where it wound through the small stretch of forest just beyond the Haunted House.

Then, when he glanced at the person, he observed that it was the very one whom of all others he did not wish to see.

It was Muriel Haven, who stood quietly at the side of the highway, surveying him with an expression that left no doubt she was waiting to speak to him.

Fred had been her playmate in childhood, and, knowing the peculiar relations between her and his client, and the impossibility of saying anything to cheer her, he hoped that she would allow him to pass with no more than a formal salutation.

But, as he lifted his hat, she signed him to approach, and he could not decline to draw his horse to one side.

"Fred, you are the very one I want to see."

"In what way can I serve you, Muriel?"

"You are a lawyer, and since you have lived in Annapolis, I have heard how famous you have become."

The young man flushed to his temples, and murmured something about the unreliability of such reports, though the sincerity of the compliment could not fail to give him pleasure.

"And you are his lawyer?"

"Whose lawyer?" he asked.

"Burd Bayard's. You will defend him when he is brought to trial for his life."

"Who told you that?" he demanded, in astonishment.

"Never mind; is it true?"

"Yes," he answered, "I have engaged to defend him, and shall do my utmost to prove his innocence. As his friend I shall act in this case, as well as his lawyer."

"Tell me," she added, stepping nearer his horse and looking up in his face; "is there any chance to save him?"

"I believe there is, though it is a slight one. If you possess any knowledge, or know of any one who does, now is your time to let me know, for we have not an hour to lose."

"I can say nothing of my own knowledge, but there is one who can, and yet he won't."

"Who is he?"

"He would kill me if I should tell you."

Fred Hazeltine was astounded.

"You can have no cause for fear, my dear friend. If you will reveal what you know to me, you shall be protected. This is a strange state of affairs, indeed, when you dare not tell the truth."

"He will know if I tell you. I would make any sacrifice for Burd; I would give my life a hundred times over, but in this case it would do no good."

"Pardon me for saying that I am a better judge of such matters than you can possibly be."

"No, it will be useless, but I will think—I will think, and perhaps—perhaps—"

There was an expression on the lovely countenance, as the girl spoke, that touched the heart of Fred Hazeltine. Her looks and her manner told such a tale of anguish, of soul-sorrow, of despairing misery, that it was a long time before he could shake off the depression they caused. As she murmured the last words, she turned about and followed the path into the wood, while he could only gaze mournfully after her and said:

"Poor girl! poor girl! God pity you!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT.

The citizens of Buzzard's Roost, who saw the Albatross make such haste down the Chesapeake on the morning of the arrest of her unfortunate captain, supposed that that was the last of the saucy schooner and her crew, but they were mistaken.

Mate Simmons and his men were not the ones to desert their master in a danger like that which had now overtaken him, and their haste in speeding down the arm of the broad bay was only a ruse intended to aid in a daring scheme the mate had formed.

There was no halt on the part of the Albatross until she was miles beyond sight of the town. Then she slackened sail, and continued beating on and off shore until night was fully come. Although the moon was shining brightly, there were clouds at intervals, which swept across its face, and helped the mate in his purpose.

A smart breeze was blowing, and it was not late in the evening, when the schooner came to anchor close inshore, and less than a mile from the wharf in front of the Golden Boar Tavern.

The boat which left the side of the Albatross contained ten men, all of whom leaped ashore, leaving only one to row back to the vessel, where he was received by the two seamen that remained. It looked indeed as if the Albatross required an unusually large crew to navigate her.

Having landed, the nine men proceeded to business. Several of them were familiar with the antiquated town of Buzzard's Roost, with its tumble-down buildings, its century-old church, its dilapidated school-house, and rickety jail, which, however, was the most secure building in the place.

The party pushed on like so many Indian scouts, until they were nigh enough to be seen by any one passing to or from the town. Indeed the party would have been discovered by the negro Pompey had they not been quick enough to screen themselves, before he caught sight of the shadowy forms crouching on the ground at the side of the highway.

When they were alone again, Mate Simmons gathered his men around him, and spoke in guarded tones:

"Boys, you all know the risk of this business. We're going to win if there is any way under heaven to do it, but, after all, the job may prove too big for us. If we fall into the hands of the authorities, there isn't one of us that will get less than ten years."

"It will be worse than that," said Jack Bathgate.

"How?" asked the mate.

"Judge Lynch, as sure as you're born."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you are right. Knowing the danger, as all of you do, I want to say that if any man prefers to withdraw, he has the right and no one shall utter a word of blame."

The mate looked expectantly round in the faces dimly visible in the gloom, but he could read no signs of faltering. There was none of that little band who did not love Captain Bayard, who had risked his life for more than one of them, and who always looked after their interests before his own.

"Come on, boys," commanded the mate in a hopeful undertone; "it's neck or nothing with us now."

Meanwhile Mr. Zeke Purrhal, turnkey of the jail in Buzzard's Roost, was snoring like the Seven Sleepers. He was in the middle of a somewhat disturbing dream when some one shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"What's the matter, Peggy?" he asked, sleepily, of his wife.

"Matter enough," she replied, in a ghostly undertone. "Gabriel has blowed his horn, and they are after you!"

"What! Who? Why?" demanded the mystified turnkey, coming suddenly to the sitting posture and staring around him.

His first belief was that his wife had spoken the solemn truth, for two large balls of fire that looked like the eyes of some ogre were at his bedside; but a second glance showed they were bull's-eye lanterns, held by two men, each of whom wore a mask over his face, while he who was nearest the head of the bed held a pistol with the muzzle almost touching the nose of the terrified turnkey.

"Good heavens!" he gasped, "what are you after? I haven't any money in the house."

"Keep quiet!" replied the one with the pistol, "and you won't get hurt; if you or your wife make any outcry, we'll send enough bullets through you both to change you into sieves."

"What—what do you want?" and the prison-keeper's teeth chattered as he spoke.

"We want what we're going to get," continued he with the pistol, in the same terrible voice; "we want the keys to the jail!"

"I—declare—I'm so flustered that I've forgot where they are—I have, as true as I live—"

"You big fool!" broke in Mr. Purrhal's

spouse; "don't you remember you put the murder your pillar, there?"

"Oh, Peggy, you've ruined me," groaned the husband; "they'll let out all the prisoners and I'll be hanged."

"No, you won't," assured Mate Simmons; "we're after one prisoner only— Ah! there you are!"

The speaker had slid his arm deftly under the pillow and withdrawn the bunch of keys, heavy and cumbersome enough to weigh several pounds. But for their hardness they might have served as a pillow for their custodian.

By this time the turnkey had recovered his self-possession to some extent. There had been a rescue from the jail twenty-odd years before, during his predecessor's time, and Mr. Purrrhal had often boasted that he could never be taken unawares. And now here he was as helpless as a child.

But it was a vast relief to know that a wholesale delivery was not intended. The glimpses which he managed to obtain of the two men by the aid of the lantern showed they were sailors, and he was quite sure of their identity; they belonged to the crew of the Albatross and had come to the rescue of their captain.

"What is the number of Captain Bayard's cell?"

"Let me see," replied the turnkey, thoughtfully, "I'm afraid it has slipped my mind—"

"Well, well, 'Zekial, if you don't beat all," broke in his wife; "you told me yourself it was 69."

Mr. Purrrhal could only give his wife one reproachful look. He put his whole soul in it, but he could not trust himself to speak.

"That 'ere big key," said the lady, indicating the immense brass contrivance in the hand of Mate Simmons, "unlocks the outer door; it's sort of rusty and you'll have to turn purty hard to make it work. If you think you ain't strong enough, why, I'll dress myself and help you. When you open the door you'll be face to face with a man with a musket and a pistol, and if you don't look out he'll shoot you dead."

"You're very kind," replied the sailor, smiling behind his mask, "we shall remember all you have said."

The husband gave another groan. No use of protesting or speaking, for he couldn't do justice to the theme.

"After you get inside and fix things with the guard, you'll take the right-hand corridor and near the other end you will see a cell with the figures '69' over the top; that's where they've got that murderer that's as sure to be hung as that my husband is scared half to death."

The callers knew the value of time too well to waste any of it in parley. Simmons turned to his companion, who was standing quietly near the foot of the bed, and spoke as though he meant him only to hear his words, though he could not keep them from the couple in bed.

"Don't leave this room till I signal to you; if he attempts to get up or give the alarm, don't throw away your bullets; give him a couple where they'll do the most good."

"You can depend on me, Cap; but, what about the woman?"

"She has got too much sense to try anything of the kind; she seems to be a perfect lady; don't fire on her till you've given her plenty of warning."

"I'll bear it all in mind; off with you, Cap!"

Mate Simmons slipped out of the room, leaving his companion to guard the husband and wife, while he directed the more desperate part of the business. In his haste, as he descended the stairs, he failed to catch sight of a white face peering out at him from a door that was opened an inch or two.

It was the door leading to the room of Delia, the twelve-year-old daughter of the turnkey. The plucky miss happened to be awake at the moment of the visit of the couple into her parents' room and she overheard nearly everything that was said. She caught enough to gain an idea of what was going on. Softly rising, she began hastily donning her clothing, resolved to take a hand in defeating the designs of the law-breakers.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHARP WORK ALL AROUND.

It need not be said that Mate Simmons allowed no grass to grow under his feet.

He realized fully the desperate nature of the business in which he and his comrades were engaged. He was well aware, too, that under the most favorable circumstances, they could not pass a fourth of the distance to where they had

landed from the Albatross, before the alarm would be given.

Whatever might be said of the population of Buzzard's Roost, the little town contained more than one brave descendant of the patriots who fought in the Revolution, and they were always ready to respond to a call for help.

On the outside of the turnkey's house, Mate Simmons narrowly missed running against a shadowy figure that appeared to be waiting for him.

"It's all right," whispered this man; "no alarm yet."

"What's been done?" asked the mate.

"The sheriff is bound and gagged and so scared that he wouldn't dare give one squawk if his mouth wasn't crammed with rags; have you the keys?"

"Yes—come ahead!"

A few steps and the enormous brass contrivance was thrust into the lock of the heavy outer door. Mrs. Purrrhal was right when she informed her visitor that the lock was rusty, but the sailor was strong, and, putting forth a powerful wrench, he slid the bar and shoved the door inward.

"Helloa, Zeke, what's up? Anything—"

Further utterance on the part of the guard was shut off by several fingers which closed with a grip of iron on his throat, while his weapons were torn from his possession before he could form any idea of the danger that had come like a cyclone.

"Not a word or you're a dead man!"

"Not a word," thought the helpless victim; "I don't think there'll be many till I get the power to speak."

One of the men was left to guard this official, who was so well satisfied that the least demonstration on his part would be followed by instant death that he became as submissive as a lamb.

The rescuers were now within the corridor, upon which opened the cell wherein Captain Bayard was confined. Everything was going well, and Mate Simmons and his men were hopeful of getting away with their loved leader before an alarm could be given.

The success of such daring schemes depends on the vim and dash with which they are pushed through to the end. None understood this better than the second officer of the Albatross. It need not be said that every man was fully armed, but they had been instructed not to fire a weapon unless it should become necessary for the success of their plan, or should be required by self-defense.

"The old lady told me it was Room 69," muttered Simmons, as he hurried along the corridor, holding his lantern above his head that he might read the numbers as he hurried by; "and I don't think, from the way she acted, she would have dared to tell an untruth. A few minutes more and this business will be decided."

The mate was in high hope, but could he have glanced into the sleeping apartments of Turnkey Purrrhal at that moment, he would not have been so confident that success was at hand.

Delia Purrrhal was given twice as much courage by nature as either of her parents. The sound of voices in their room reached her ears, and, as has already been shown, caused her to make a little investigation on her own part.

It took only a short time for such a bright-witted girl to learn that a party of men had secured possession of the jail, for the purpose of liberating Captain Bayard.

"And I'm going to prevent them," she said to herself, as she hastily donned her clothing.

It was a plucky resolution, but few grown persons could have believed there was any hope of success; for Delia knew that the utmost she could do was to ring the alarm-bell to call the neighbors to the help of her father.

Not only was that the quickest way of bringing friends to their assistance, but it was the only one within possible reach. The masked men were too vigilant to allow any one to leave the house of the turnkey; and, to reach the rope dangling from the belfry, she would be obliged to pass through her parents' room, where the man in a mask, and with a pistol and light, was on guard.

"I'm going to do it," she murmured, with a whispered prayer, as she set out; "if he catches sight of me, I'll run for the rope and give it one or two pulls before he can shoot me."

The sly peep she cast into the room showed her the guard sitting on a chair with his back toward her. His lamp rested on a stand at his elbow, and shed a dim light through the apartment, making the situation tenfold more terrible than it could have been by the light of day.

On the other side of the guard was the door opening into the hall where hung the rope from the big bell in the tower above. To reach this, she must cross the bedroom in which the guard sat. There was room to do so without tiptoeing in front of the frightful man, who was not likely to detect her, unless she betrayed herself by some slip.

It seems singular, but it was a fact that the girl's greatest misgiving was on account of her parents. They could not fail to see her ghostly figure stealing silently behind the guard, and it was more than probable they would betray her by some word, since they could hardly be expected to understand at a glance her scheme for baffling the raiders.

But there was not a moment to spare, and the brave girl entered upon her dangerous venture with the same coolness that had marked her conduct from the first. The door gave not the slightest sound as she drew it back, and, reaching the dainty foot into the room, she stepped silently forward.

At that instant her parents saw her. The two were lying back on the pillows, but with their heads sufficiently elevated to look about the apartment. The mother straightened up, and was in the very act of speaking, when her husband, quicker than she to recognize this phase of the business, gave her a warning pinch.

But the watchful guard noticed the startled look, and observed that it was directed toward the door, through which he and the mate had entered. He turned his gaze in that direction.

A single second sooner, and everything would have been lost; but Delia had not paused at sight of the action of her mother, and raising her finger threateningly, she continued forward with the same noiseless step.

Thus, when the man looked at the door, she was directly behind his chair.

"I wonder what's up," he growled, springing from his seat, and hastening forward to investigate for himself.

This was Delia's opportunity, and she glided into the other room and was out of sight before he could reach the opposite door and turn around.

"I don't see nothing," he muttered, after surveying his surroundings by the aid of his lantern, "but," he added, as he walked back to his seat and looked over the interior, "it strikes me that that door over there was open awhile ago, and now it's shut as tight—great Caesar!"

At that instant, the bell in the tower rung out clear and sharp on the still night. Some one was swinging it with a vigor and fierceness that was sure to rouse every one in Buzzard's Roost!

With an execration the sailor made a dash for the hall, but found the door fastened. A kick, however, sent that flying off its hinges, and he burst into the hall beyond, where Delia Purrrhal was ringing the bell so furiously.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE RESOLVE.

MEANWHILE Mate Simmons had kept things moving. A few minutes brought him in front of Cell 69. His key was ready, and being thrust into the lock and sharply turned, the door swung inward, and the sailor stepped across the threshold.

"Helloa, Cap!" he called out, holding his light above his head, and catching sight of the manacled form on the bed, "wake up! you've got visitors."

"In the name of the seven wonders, who are you?" demanded Captain Bayard, rising on his elbow, staring at the masked face, and failing to recognize the voice of his mate.

"Don't you know me?" chuckled the latter, deftly slipping the mask from his countenance, and holding the light so that it revealed his pleasant features.

"Great Heavens! Tom, what brings you here?" asked Captain Bayard, struggling to the sitting posture.

"That's a pretty question to ask! Why, we've come for you; what else could be our business?"

"How many men have you?"

"There are ten of us altogether."

"How did you manage to get in here?"

"That was easy enough; one of the boys has the turnkey under his eye, another has fixed the sheriff, and another is on guard at the door of the jail."

"And the Albatross?"

"She's lying a short distance below, and there's a brisk breeze on the bay to-night. We'll have you far out of sight by daylight, and we can laugh at the whole State of Maryland."

"Has everything been fixed so that you're sure there won't be any slip?"

"There won't be anywhere. Everything has worked splendidly from the first; but we haven't any time to throw away; I'm ready to knock those irons off you."

"Well, Tom, I can't tell you how much I appreciate the devotion of yourself and the boys, but I can't go with you."

Simmons almost dropped his lantern, as with a gasp and recoil he exclaimed:

"What?"

"I mean it, and you can't change my resolution."

"You are crazy! You are not in your right mind! You must go! You shall go! By gracious! I'll carry you in my arms, and we'll take you off in spite of yourself," and the enthusiastic mate would have executed his threat had not his superior officer sternly interposed.

"Listen, Tom! Four years ago, when I was in danger of hanging, I sneaked out of the country. I have been re-arrested, and now I'm going to stand trial. To run off again looks too much like a confession of guilt."

"But I hear they're going to hang you, anyway."

"That can't be told, for I haven't been tried. I have good counsel and we are hopeful of victory, but if I was sure of defeat, I would stay here and see the thing out."

The mate took his seat on the rough couch beside his half-reclining chief, and looked fixedly at him.

"I'm blessed if I understand this business, Cap; you don't talk and act like yourself."

Burd Bayard could not help smiling at the earnestness of his devoted officer, and he made answer:

"Nevertheless, I am quite sure it is I, and if I am mad, you will live long enough to see there is some method in my madness."

"I've a great notion to take you off in spite of yourself. After we get back in the cabin of the Albatross, we can sit down and argue the question."

"Don't argue it, Tom; I know I have your best wishes, but my step is a deliberate one, and nothing can dissuade me."

Mate Simmons parted his lips to make another protest, when he was startled almost out of his senses by the furious clanging of the bell in the tower over head.

"Not another minute!" commanded Captain Bayard. "The citizens are gathering and everyone of you will be captured. Off with you!"

"But—but," stammered the mate, bewildered and uncertain what he ought to do. "I cannot—"

"Off with you! The lives of the boys are in your hands!"

And springing from the bed, he fairly pushed his dazed visitor from the cell, despite his own hindering manacles. Before his friend could resist or form any plan he was in the corridor without.

"You are safe!" he called back, as the heavy door banged behind him, "for even in Maryland they don't hang natural-born fools."

The bell ceased its clanging. The sailor guarding the turnkey and his wife had kicked in the door and intercepted Delia Purrbal. When he saw that it was a pretty young girl who was leaping upward and frantically ringing the bell, he restrained the upraised hand and recoiled in amazement.

"Well, you're one of them!" he exclaimed; "but you must be tired, so you can take a rest."

"Now you can shoot!" said Delia, calmly folding her arms; "I have aroused the citizens."

"Shoot?" repeated the officer. "I would as soon shoot my great-grandmother. You are a plucky girl; back with you into the room of your parents."

Delia would have hesitated, had not her mother called her sharply just then. She darted through the door, and throwing herself on the bed, buried her face on the bosom of her parent and sobbed like a broken-hearted child.

She had finished her work and the overwrought nerves gave way.

Realizing the irremediable mischief done, the sailor extinguished his lamp and went downstairs and outside on the jump.

As he did so, he caught sight of shadowy figures darting hither and thither. Despite the brief time that had elapsed, the people had sprung from their beds and were hastening toward the jail to obey the appeal to them.

But Mate Simmons was also there, with his affrighted men gathered around him. He quickly explained the strange refusal of Captain Bayard to go with him and added:

"We must make a run for it! Get back to

where the boat is waiting as quickly as your legs will carry you."

He set the example and a break was made. By promptly seizing their advantage they were soon clear of the excited little town without any collision with the people.

Once on the highway, they sped forward so rapidly that they safely reached the spot where the small boat was awaiting them, just at the time when something like an organized pursuit was set on foot.

The moment they stepped upon the deck of the Albatross, the anchor was hoisted, sail spread and the sassy vessel headed out of the arm of the bay. A spanking breeze sent her bowling along at a merry rate, with the foam curling from her shapely prow, while she careened far to one side under the impulse of the wind that bore her rapidly from the scene of danger.

When daylight came, she was far down the Chesapeake, and heading toward the Atlantic. The glass of the mate pointed back toward Buzzard's Roost which had long since dropped out of sight, failed to show any sail that looked like that of a pursuer.

It cannot be said that Mate, or rather Captain Simmons, as he was to be henceforth, would have felt any alarm had such a sight met his gaze, for he had seen the speed of the Albatross tested too often to fear anything of that nature.

"I made a mistake, however," he said, regretfully, "in not bringing Cap away in spite of himself. He's as sure to be hanged now as that his name is Burd Bayard."

CHAPTER XV. A LUCKY MISTAKE.

WHILE these exciting events were taking place in Buzzard's Roost, Fred Hazeltine found himself involved in a series of adventures hardly less stirring in their nature.

He was riding along on a lonely road just as night was closing in, and was approaching the old Black Bear Tavern where he meant to stay over night to resume his journey to Buzzard's Roost at an early hour the following morning.

It will be recalled that he had started toward the State Capital with the expectation of being absent several days, and had so notified his friend Captain Bayard. The brilliant young counselor, however, changed his mind. He concluded that the important business in the city could wait until the slight clue he had struck in the shape of the rusty pistol should be followed without interruption to the end, whatever that might prove to be.

Thus it came about that at the moment he ought to have been riding into Annapolis, he was only a few miles from Buzzard's Roost. By pushing on, he could have reached his parents' home by midnight; but his horse was tired and he thought it prudent to gain a good night's rest the better to be prepared for the arduous work before him. In this lonely place, there was much better prospect of such refreshment than in the atmosphere of Buzzard's Roost.

When perhaps a couple of miles from the Black Bear, Fred observed a couple of horsemen ahead of him. The sun had set and he could not gain a clear view of them, but he saw them look around more than once, as if they felt special interest in him.

"I don't know you," said the lawyer to himself, "and I can't say that I'm anxious to make your acquaintance; so, unless you hold up for me, I will deprive myself of that pleasure."

The horsemen regulated their pace, so that the distance between the parties was reduced to a hundred yards, more or less. Then they spurred their animals into a more rapid walk, with the evident purpose of keeping the space about the same.

Fred Hazeltine believed these men had designs against him, though it was hard to guess what they were. If they knew him, they must have been aware that he had little in the way of plunder to tempt footpads; but, if unaware of his identity, it would be in keeping with the times, the neighborhood and the legends of the country, for them to murder him for booty.

"I have two pistols with me," he reflected, "though one of them is good for nothing, since it is the rusty old weapon that hasn't been fired for four years. There are two good loaded barrels in the other, however, and they will give a good account of themselves, if necessary."

There was woods on both sides of the road, and when Fred saw the two men wheel their animals and suddenly disappear among the trees, he was sure he was "in for it." He drew his pistol and held it over the saddle in front of him, while he kept his eyes and ears open.

Deeming it best to bring matters to an end, without delay, he spurred his animal into a brisk

gallop. A strange creeping came over him as he approached the spot where the horsemen had vanished, and he was never so sure of anything as he was that he would serve as a target for one or two shots.

Happily, however, he was disappointed. Nothing broke the stillness, but the sound of his own horse's hoofs as he swept along on a brisk canter.

"That's mighty queer!" reflected Fred, when he knew he was some distance beyond the "danger point;" "it looks as if I was mistaken about them—I don't know about that, though."

This qualifying clause was the result of what he saw when he looked around. The horsemen were in sight again, at the same distance that they were in advance, at the time of turning in among the trees. They and the lawyer had merely changed places.

It is far more uncomfortable to have a suspected enemy in the rear than in the front. Fred determined that whatever took place, the space separating them should not be lessened. His horse was pretty well worn, but he was still capable of high speed for a few miles.

The rider jerked the rein sharply and the animal bounded off at a pace which rapidly drew him away from the others. Before half the intervening distance to the tavern was passed, the young man found himself unable, when he looked over his shoulder, to catch sight of either of his pursuers, as he considered them.

Bringing his horse to a halt for a moment, he listened, but could catch no sound of the hoofs.

"I shouldn't wonder if I mistook them altogether," he said, as he resumed his advance on a walk; "or, what is just as likely, they were trying to have a little sport at my expense."

This would have been a comforting conclusion could he who formed it have convinced himself that it was correct; but, seek as much as he might, he could not free himself of a suspicion that these men had not yet abandoned their sinister designs on him.

Reaching the little tumble-down tavern, which had been known as "The Black Bear" from Revolutionary times, Fred dismounted and turned his horse over to the puffy landlord, Peleg McFadden, while the landlady bustled about to prepare him a supper.

Fred found he was the only guest at the little inn, and, after smoking a cigar and chatting for awhile, he withdrew to his room to gain the night's rest which he craved.

This would have been at his command could he have freed his mind of the misgiving about the two horsemen. He had expected they would follow him to the inn and spend the night there. If they had some purpose to carry out respecting him it would seem that such would be the most natural course; but, though he lay awake a long time, he heard nothing of them, and when the sounds showed that the landlord and his wife had retired for the night, he dismissed all fear, and floated off into the land of dreams.

It need not be said that before retiring for the night, the guest took every precaution against a nocturnal visit from the parties who had disturbed his thoughts. The key was turned in his lock and he placed both pistols under his pillow, where he was sure they would be within instant reach in case of need. He was a light sleeper and was confident that the slightest disturbance would awaken him.

But, as has been stated before, Fred Hazeltine was wearied in body and mind. His unusually long ride that day had worn upon his body to that extent that, when he closed his eyes, they did not open until the morning sun was shining in the small room.

"Well," said he, as he recalled his situation, "my fears were without foundation. They must have been a couple of innocent countrymen who attempted a little sport with me—Halloa! how's that?"

He noticed that the door which he had locked so carefully the night before was on a crack, and the key which he had turned lay on the floor.

"I have had a visit, sure enough," was his natural conclusion, as he made a hasty examination for other evidences.

But his watch and the moderate amount of money in his possession were undisturbed, nor were there any signs that his clothing had been molested.

"I don't understand why any parties entering a sleeping-room should leave without carrying all the plunder possible with them, and were I not certain that I locked that door I would believe it was a dream. It may be the landlord has taken a look inside, though why he should do so in that style is a mystery."

Having donned his garments and finished his

ablutions, he suddenly recalled the pistols under his pillow. Flinging the head-rests aside, he discovered that one of the weapons was missing.

He searched every part of the bed, looking under and in every possible place where the weapon might have been hidden, but it was invisible. Other hands had certainly taken it from the room.

All doubt on this point removed, the motives and action of the horsemen became clear as noon-day.

"They were after that rusty pistol which is to form such strong evidence in unearthing the assassin of the overseer and his wife. They were not the principals in the crime, but have been employed to secure the weapon.

"They set out to follow me to Annapolis, and have been watching me from the first, though I saw nothing of them until last night. They were instructed to get the tell-tale evidence, if possible, without taking my life, for that would complicate the business unnecessarily. When they turned aside in the road, they must have been thinking of violence, but changed their minds.

"They did a wiser thing by sneaking into my room here in this old tavern, but they overreached themselves."

Fred Hazeltine felt himself warranted in sitting down in his chair and indulging in a grim smile.

His visitors of the night before seemed to have lost sight of the probability that he carried two pistols instead of a single weapon. The rogue who slipped his hand beneath the pillow, luckily touched the wrong weapon, and never thinking that might be the case, he had quietly appropriated it and withdrawn.

"I have lost a good pistol," mused the lawyer, "but I would rather part with a thousand such than the old rusty one they left behind."

Going below stairs, he acquainted the landlord with what had taken place. Mr. McFadden was very indignant that his house, for the first time in its history, should be subjected to such an indignity. He and his wife made careful search, and discovered without difficulty the means by which the burglars had effected an entrance.

It was no credit to their skill that they succeeded; for a child could have done as well. Robbers were the last people that were feared in the Black Bear, and consequently the way was invitingly open to them when they chose to call.

CHAPTER XVI. VISITED IN JAIL.

It was hard for the authorities of the jail to understand that the prisoner, whose disgraceful doom seemed a foregone conclusion, had actually refused to pass through the door of escape when it was open to him, but the evidence was so strong that the sheriff could not avoid believing the extraordinary story. While it did not affect his belief in the guilt of the accused, it inclined him to less rigor in his confinement. The jail was strengthened, extra precautions were taken to prevent a repetition of the surprise, for there were many who believed the Albatross would return, and the irons were removed from Captain Bayard's limbs.

On the day following the daring attempt at rescue, he was sitting in his cell, wondering and speculating over the probable outcome of the unprecedented situation in which he was placed, and wishing that the light-hearted, hopeful Fred Hazeltine would hasten his return from Annapolis.

There was no regret on the part of the young captain because he had refused the offer of freedom. Existence had reached that point with him that he was resolved to end the suspense one way or the other, once and forever. He had been a fugitive for years, and, as is often the case with guilty criminals, his spirit had rebelled to that degree that he felt actual punishment itself would be a relief to the fearful depression of mind he had undergone so long.

"If Muriel would have gone with me," he mused, pacing his narrow cell, "I would have fled to some remote corner of the world, where we could have forgotten the curse of her parent, and lived and died happy in one another's love, but—"

"Captain, are you prepared to receive a call from a young lady?"

It was Turnkey Purral who asked the startling question. The fussy officer took a peep within the cell as he spoke, and satisfying himself that the prisoner was ready for company, he did not wait for any reply.

"Walk right in, Miss Haven; I'll leave you alone for awhile and knock when it's time for you to leave.

And before Burd Bayard could fairly shake himself together, the young lady stood within the cell and calmly confronted him.

Had our hero been given a few minutes in which to nerve himself for this interview, he might have been able to follow the heroic course he had laid out for himself, but as it was, all such Spartan resolutions were swept to the winds. Stretching out his arms, he sprang impulsively forward, and murmuring the words, "Oh, Muriel! my loved! my lost, my own Muriel!" pressed her convulsively to his heart.

And where was all her self-possession and self-restraint?

Scattered to nothingness by the words, the manner and the wild embrace of him whom she loved with an affection she could never know for another.

Her head sunk on his shoulder, and for several minutes their tears mingled in hot rain, while their hearts throbbed with a tempest of emotion that stirred their very souls.

And as they gave way at the same moment, so was their recovery simultaneous.

Lifting the queenly head from his shoulder, he gently led her to a chair, while he seated himself in the only remaining one, the two so placed that they looked in each other's faces while the words fell from their lips.

It was she who was the first to speak.

"I have heard all about the strange visit of last night," she said, with something of her old self-possession.

"Do you think I did wrong in refusing to accept the chance to get away?"

"I cannot say that you did wrong; I can only say that I am sorry you did not take the opportunity which I am afraid will never come again to you."

"Fred thinks there is hope of my innocence being established."

"I trust so, but I tremble for the result."

"It does look dark, as he freely admits, but there is a magnetism in hopefulness which you cannot resist. I wonder whether I am wrong in suspecting that he has secured some evidence which is valuable and which he keeps from me?"

"I think you are right."

There was a peculiar intonation in these words, which thrilled the captain, and he looked inquiringly at the adored girl for an explanation. She smiled faintly, but did not speak the enlightening sentence. Instead of doing so, she said in a low, tremulous voice:

"I trust, Burd, you are prepared for the worst."

"Prepared for the worst?" he repeated, bitterly. "What can be worse than what I have endured for the last four years. I have determined to face my trial and to accept unflinchingly its verdict; but suppose my innocence should be made as clear as the noonday sun, it will be a great triumph, but it cannot lift the sorrow from my heart, for I am doomed to go through life without you."

"Be it so," she said, with a spirituality of resignation, like that which beautifies the face of an angel; "if God, for some purpose which we cannot fathom, has willed that it shall be so, it is not ours to complain. I know I possess your love, and you possess mine, wholly. Our make is such that no change can ever come to us. Let us each dedicate our future lives to the service of our heavenly Father, assured as we are that it will all be made right in the end, and that the time is certain to come when He will wipe away all tears from our eyes."

"You are made of the stuff which saints are composed of, but I am not. I cannot rise to the spiritual heights that you do."

"You can, if you so will, with God's help!"

"No," he said, sorrowfully, "you are a heroine, and I am a coward. I sit as did the prophet at the feet of Gamaliel, except that your utterances are beyond my grasp. To me you are exalted, not alone above other women, but above humanity."

She shook her head reprovingly.

"Thousands more worthy than I have died for their belief in Him who died for us all; reverence not me, but the Author of the utterance which I can only repeat."

Burd Bayard scanned the lovely face before him with a strange, inquiring expression. A thrilling question continually formed itself unbidden in his mind. It was,

"Is it actually Muriel Haven or is it some one else? The features and countenance are the same, but there is something in the looks, the expression, and sometimes in the tones, which seem not to be hers, but to belong to some one else!"

Despite all he could do, an awful suspicion

came over him that she was associated with that wondrous voice he had heard in the Haunted House, and that in some manner beyond his comprehension her being was interwoven with the supernatural inhabitants of that old structure.

But he would not permit himself to dwell upon the appalling subject. By a mental effort he forced it behind him and faced the present.

"My fate will soon be known," he said, coming back to the matter which had filled the minds of both so long, "and Fred says he has no doubt that the issue of my trial will be a sentence of death."

"Where, then, is there hope?" she asked, vainly trying to avert the shudder that shook her frame.

"You have a right to know my theory, which I am confident is the right one. He suspects the real criminals, but he does not wish them to know it. He has not enough evidence as yet to cause even their arrest. He seeks to throw them off their guard, hoping thereby to secure the evidence that will insure justice to them and save me."

"I know whom he suspects, but I will leave him to tell you: he has gotten part of his information from me, and he is right—"

At this juncture the turnkey rapped softly on the door as an intimation that it was time to bring the interview to an end.

Muriel rose, and Burd once more took her in his arms.

"Good-by, my guardian angel!"

"Good-by, my own Burd!"

Their lips met in one long, loving pressure, and then, with the gallantry of a Crusader, he conducted her to the door, saluted and surrendered her to the care of the turnkey.

She had been gone less than fifteen minutes when Fred Hazeltine burst into the cell like so much sunshine, with his account of all that had happened to him since bidding 'good-by' to his client, the day before.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO-MORROW! TO-MORROW.

THE trial of Burd Bayard for murder was one of the most remarkable in the history of Maryland.

Among some of the features of that extraordinary event was the fact that the trial did not take place until four years after the commission of the crime, though there are not wanting many instances in which the interval was still greater.

But some curious fascination brought the young man back to the spot, when all hope of his arrest and punishment had vanished from the minds of the people.

Burd Bayard was known to every one in the neighborhood of Buzzard's Roost, where he was born and where he spent his boyhood. His parents, who were in good circumstances, were lost at sea, when he was but a child. He had received a liberal education, and, showing a predilection for the ocean, had spent a good deal of his time on it, becoming a skillful sailor before reaching his majority.

He was universally liked, for, up to the time of the murder of the overseer, he had never been suspected of anything mean or unmanly. He was kind, charitable, brave and handsome, and so generally liked that when it became known that he and Muriel Haven, the only child of the fiery Colonel Haven, were betrothed, the popular opinion was that no better match could be made. Even Colonel Haven himself, who naturally thought the world hardly contained any one good enough for Muriel, freely admitted that he was satisfied with her choice.

Thus matters stood when the frightful assassination of the overseer took place, and Burd Bayard fled the country in the darkness, to escape the penalty of the crime.

Without dwelling further on the particulars of the crime, or delaying over the preliminaries, let us come to the trial itself.

The first witnesses were the negroes Pompey and Pete, who were almost frightened to death when placed in the witness-box, and after the other, and asked to recall the incidents of that memorable night.

The poor fellows never would have got through with their testimony had they not been carefully handled by the prosecuting attorney and even by the court itself.

The story which they told has already been outlined to the reader. It was they who, on that night, observed Bayard emerge from the house of Mr. Kirke Warman, from which smoke afterward was seen issuing, and which led them to rush into the building just in time to extin-

guish the flames and to discover the mangled bodies of the overseer and his wife.

It nearly broke the heart of Pomp to give this damaging testimony, for he knew how it would affect the young captain whom he loved so well. He had persuaded Pete to agree with him on a line of evidence intended to clear Bayard. They meant to swear they had seen three men eight feet high, armed with spears and hatchets, and painted like Indians, smash in the doors and commit the deed despite all they could do to save the lives of the overseer and his wife, but, when Pomp found himself on the witness-stand, his courage forsook him and he dared tell nothing but the simple truth.

This testimony, as the reader will understand, could not have convicted Burd Bayard, if it were unsupported, since it was given by two slaves "before the war." But, that which clinched the business was the evidence of Josiah Brigham, the white man, who met the prisoner on that eventful night. This corroborated in every particular the statements of the negroes.

Fred Hazeltine was too prudent to attempt to weaken the testimony of Mr. Brigham. It carried the conviction of truth in itself and was given by a man whom no inducement in the world could persuade to tell an untruth.

The witness rendered his story absolutely irresistible by his futile effort to hide the distress its utterance caused him. He had been an intimate friend of Burd's father and could not have loved his own son more than the handsome young sea captain.

When he virtually pronounced his sentence it was conscience alone that led him to do so.

There was other testimony, including that of Dr. Hazeltine, who made the *post-mortem*, and that of the officer who arrested Bayard when in bed, and with the tell-tale evidence of his crime upon him.

No matter how solemn the occasion, nor how weighty the interests involved, the minds of the spectators and of those concerned will react from their intense depression and find something to amuse when such things seem sacrilegious.

The tint of comedy in this tragedy appeared when it became the privilege of Fred Hazeltine to cross-examine his father. As the son looked up and encountered the gaze of his parent, fixed frowningly upon him, just as it had been fixed not many years before when about to chastise him for some breach of discipline, he could not avoid blushing, and then, to his own dismay, in spite of all he could do, he broke into silent but hearty laughter.

Every one in the court-room, including the presiding judge and Burd Bayard caught the situation and joined in the smile—the single exception being Dr. Hazeltine himself, who contracted his brows and looked as if he was about to step forward and taking his son by the nape of the neck, stretch him across his knee and administer punishment just as in the good old times.

Fred's questions were unimportant, not because he was afraid to turn the tables on his respected parent, now that the situation was so peculiar, but from the nature of the case, there was nothing to be gained by any series of questions of the physician, whose testimony could not extend beyond that which related to the *post-mortem* of the bodies, whose manner of death had never been questioned by any one.

To the spectators who crowded the court-room, the course of Fred Hazeltine seemed singularly weak. His questions to the various witnesses amounted to nothing. He seemed to handle all gingerly and refrained from any attempts to break them down.

"He knows there is no hope; he is really doing what he can, which isn't anything at all."

This was the general verdict, but there were several who knew the brilliant young counselor better. Doctor Hazeltine could not be mistaken in reading the expression on the face of his son, whom he ought to understand more thoroughly than any one else.

"I tell you," he said that night, in discussing the matter with his wife, after Fred had gone to his room, "there's something in the wind; I know that racial clean through. I saw several looks pass between him and the prisoner which no one else noticed besides the judge, and he agreed with me that the scamp is holding something back, and when it does come it will be a powder-mine explosion. We'll wait till to-morrow!"

Ay, to-morrow! to-morrow!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE DAY OF DOOM.

THE second and concluding day of the memorable trial consisted of more than one sur-

The court-room was crowded and crammed until the wonder was how any one in the audience could draw a full breath.

It need not be said that Muriel Haven was not present.

Burd took notes of everything that passed, and this was sent to her immediately on the conclusion of the trial. Fred Hazeltine added a few words, bidding her keep up courage even if her friend should be pronounced guilty.

Doctor Hazeltine was allowed a seat beside the presiding judge, who was an old acquaintance. The venerable physician did not fail to call at The Cedars immediately after adjournment and acquaint the widow of Colonel Haven with everything that had passed during the day. Fortunately for the doctor, his patients seemed to take a favorable turn for a few days, so that he enjoyed something in the nature of a vacation, and was able to give his attention to the all-absorbing subject.

The striking feature of the closing day was the disappointment caused by Fred Hazeltine. As has been stated, the presiding judge and Doctor Hazeltine himself were confident that he had simply masked his battery, which would be fired at the proper moment, and as likely as not knock the whole prosecution into "asteroidal smithereens."

But there was nothing of the kind. The counsel for the defendant offered no evidence for his side except that he excused himself. He was permitted to take the witness-stand and repeated the story which the reader has already heard. He told it in a straightforward manner which was not without its effect, but it was not sufficient to shake the mountain of testimony against him.

In that assemblage there were not half a dozen men who did not sympathize with Burd, but the sympathy was that which we all feel for him who has been led astray by temptation, mingled with wonder that any one could have suffered himself to go wrong, when there was so little cause for it.

The speech of Fred Hazeltine was one of the most brilliant and powerful of his life. Even his stern old father felt a thrill of admiration, when his eloquent sentences rung through the little building. Every eye was fixed on the young man, and no heart was untouched by his impassioned utterances. More than one juror blew his nose suspiciously, and blinked and winked so vigorously that there could be no mistaking the cause. The judge leaned his head on his hand and fixed his gaze admiringly on the orator, for whom he was willing to confess he felt a strong liking.

When his splendid speech was finished, and while there was a slight rustling, and the inevitable confusion preceding the charge of the judge, he leaned toward the impassive physician at his side, and whispered:

"Doctor, you have reason to be proud of that boy; that was a magnificent speech."

"Yes, pretty fair—pretty fair!" replied the father, clearing his throat.

"I have listened to Webster and Clay, and I never heard them make a finer peroration."

"You're extravagant, judge," protested the doctor, whose face could not conceal his paternal pride, though he would not admit it. "But what does he expect to accomplish by that speech? Where is the evidence that I supposed he had in reserve?"

"I confess I am surprised. It may be said that the defense is without any defense at all. If the jury were called upon to pronounce their verdict this minute, they would acquit the prisoner; but, after they have talked and consulted together, there is but one thing for them to do, and they will see it without any charge from me. I must say something, however, but it will be brief."

While the jury were out, not a person left the room. The conviction was so general that they would be absent only a short time that all were more than willing to await the verdict.

After the departure of the jury, Fred Hazeltine leaned over so that his mouth was close to the ear of the prisoner and whispered:

"There is disappointment everywhere at the weakness of our defense; it is natural it should be so."

"I am afraid you have presumed too far."

"It was the course I had determined on, after the most careful consideration, as being the only one that offered any prospect of winning. Let them pronounce you guilty, and let the judge name the day when you shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead;—all that will convince the real criminal that he is safe. He will throw aside his caution and I shall have

the opportunity I am waiting for to impale him."

"Pray Heaven that it may be so, but, you can't expect a man to feel very comfortable when twelve of his countrymen declare on their oaths that he is guilty of murder, and the presiding judge pronounces his sentence of death."

"I don't imagine the sensation is very pleasant, but you must cheer yourself up by the certainty that you will never be hanged."

"I must confess that there is a good deal of cheer in your words, but they are not sufficient to remove all misgivings."

"Now, my dear boy," said the lawyer, lowering his voice, and almost touching the ear of his client with his lips, "I will tell you something that will startle you."

"What is it?"

"You must brace yourself to restrain any excitement you may feel at my words. You must not start, nor look around, nor show by your manner that I have uttered a word except that which would be natural under the circumstances."

"I assure you I will not."

"There can be no doubt on that point?" remarked Fred, inquiringly.

"I have had enough training during the last few years to be able to stand anything. Let me hear what you have to say."

"Well, the man who killed Kirke Warman and his wife is in this room this very minute and is standing within twelve feet of us! He was here yesterday and he is looking at us now!"

It was hard for Bayard to prevent himself from leaping to his feet. Fred heard him breathe faster, and, fearful he would betray himself, he quietly placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Remember what I said—not a word, look or start, for he is suspicious and sees nobody in the court-room but you and me."

"Who is he?"

"I shall not tell you his name, for you could not help frightening him by your manner. I don't believe he will ever feel safe until you are hanged and out of the way. He called on me last night!"

Captain Bayard had his nerves under control now, and talked with as much coolness as did his counsel.

"What was his business?"

"It was he who hired the two men to get the pistol from me."

"How did he learn you had it?"

"From one of the children of the present overseer. It goes to show that, despite your utmost care, you are liable to slip up at any time. I cautioned the overseer and his wife, and nothing ever could have been obtained from them, but one of their children, unobserved by us, saw the father hand me the pistol. The criminal was furtively watching me, but from such a distance that he could not tell what it was that came into my hands."

"How did he make out when he tried to pump you?"

"I don't think he learned much, but he managed matters with excellent skill and had not my suspicions been fixed on him, they never could have been aroused by his words or manner."

"I don't see why he should have been so greatly concerned about the pistol alone?"

"It was not the pistol alone. His main purpose was to learn whether I suspected him, or rather whether I suspected any one besides you of being the murderer."

"Do you think you misled him?"

"I am confident I did so. Of course my office as your counsel closed my lips as to any admission of my belief in your guilt, but you can understand that it was not very difficult to convey the impression I ought to give, without saying so in words."

"It must cause him peculiar sensations to listen to the condemnation of a man whom he knows to be innocent of a crime which he himself committed."

"His only peculiar sensations are the fear that the innocent party will not be convicted."

"Why is he so suspicious when nothing has appeared to alarm him?"

"Partly because of the guilty conscience, which will never allow him to rest, and partly because the evidence for which he knows I have been searching so industriously, has not been brought forward."

"It ought to have the opposite effect."

"I hope it has, but you can understand why he feels uneasy—'Sh!'"

At this moment, there was a stir in the crowd near the door, through which the jury had re-

tired. Little more than half an hour had passed since their withdrawal, and their absence was probably due to the wish to avoid unseemly haste in disposing of such a weighty matter than from any difficulty in arriving at a conclusion.

Breathless silence followed the jury's entrance, though there was not a person in the crowded room who was not certain of the verdict. Nevertheless, there is something awful in the sound of the word "GUILTY!" when pronounced by the foreman of a jury which holds the fate of a human being in its hands.

Such was the verdict given in the court-room of Buzzard's Roost, where Captain Burd Bayard had just been tried on the charge of murder of the most shocking character.

CHAPTER XIX.

WEAVING THE WEB.

CAPTAIN BURD BAYARD was remanded for sentence. It was evident that the judge expected his counsel to give notice of appeal or to make some motion intended to prolong the time between the unfortunate young man's conviction and execution, but Fred Hazeltine remained dumb!

Word was sent to Muriel within five minutes after the verdict was rendered, with a significant note from the lawyer that the end was not yet. Then having played his game so successfully, he set to work once more in earnest.

On the afternoon succeeding the conviction, he held a long interview with Bayard in the jail. The lawyer was poor and his client was rich. Bayard compelled him to take a much larger check than he thought necessary, instructed him to spare not an hour or minute, but to push forward, regardless of money or any consideration. The sailor felt that he was standing in the shadow of the gallows, and he could not force back a nervous dread that the final effort had been postponed too long.

"Is there none whom you can get to help you?" asked Bayard, at the close of their long consultation.

"I have tried to think of some one, but can call none to mind; I shall have to go it alone. There are plenty who would gladly give their help, but they are not of the right stamp: alert, wide-awake, quick to catch a clue, and relentless and skillful in carrying it out."

"I can think of no one," added Captain Bayard, "and shall leave you to succeed through your own efforts and the help of Heaven."

"The surveillance under which I have been moving for the past week has been relaxed. Nevertheless, I am not forgotten, and I think I shall find it necessary to fix up some kind of a disguise for myself."

"I hope you will be more successful than I was, but," added the sailor with great impressiveness, "I am convinced of one thing: the key to the secret you must unravel to save my life is to be found in the Haunted House and nowhere else."

"I am as sure you are right as I am that we are alive and talking together this minute. To the Haunted House, therefore, I go this very night."

Bayard shuddered.

"You are as confirmed an unbeliever in ghosts, spooks and all that sort of thing as I, but I tell you, Frederick Hazeltine, that you will be called upon to pass through an experience that is enough to try the nerves of a man of iron."

"Bah!" replied the young lawyer with a snap of his fingers, "such talk only makes me the more eager to spend a night there. I will take a pistol, and am ready to meet Beelzebub and his whole gang."

And with a few more jesting words, he was gone.

The lawyer had fixed upon a clear line of policy to follow. He was anxious to learn the meaning of the letters "P. L. M." which were in such plain sight on the pistol. He had been unable as yet to think of any person whom they fitted, and thus found himself baffled in one direction before he could take a step forward.

But his first visit was to his own home where he found his parents and told them he wished to venture out so fixed up that his identity would not be suspected by any one. His wishes were gratified, both the doctor and his wife lending such help that when, in the gloom of the evening, the young man started in the direction of the Haunted House his most intimate friend would not have suspected his personality.

While thus engaged in getting ready, Fred's tongue was busy questioning his father, who confirmed what he had suspected, namely, that the

negro known as Jingle possessed valuable knowledge about the crime of four years before. But he had been "hushed" in such an effective manner that there seemed no possibility of getting him to admit that he knew anything of the tragedy.

"I'll fetch him!" muttered Fred, as he strode down the road, much as Captain Burd Bayard had gone over it some nights before.

It need not be said that as the young man moved along the road in the gloom of the early evening, he kept his wits about him. He fancied that some one had followed him at a distance when he made his way to his father's house, but he was not sure on that point.

The night was darker than on the evening which brought such a memorable experience to Burd Bayard, but he could see objects quite distinctly several rods away. He peered in front and behind, often pausing and listening with the intensity of an Iroquois Indian in the camp of his enemies.

"It won't be safe for any one to dog my footsteps," he muttered, as he resumed his stealthy advance; "the time for jesting is past, and I mean business—"

His heart gave a quick throb, for at that moment he caught the faint but unmistakable outlines of a man walking in the middle of the road just in front of him.

Without pausing to reflect, Fred hurried several steps and called out in a suppressed voice:

"Hold on!"

The man started with evident fear and faced about. As he did so the lawyer observed that he was a negro who was carrying a large basket.

"Wh-wh-wh-a-t you want, ma-as-sa!" he asked in a chattering voice and with trembling knees.

"What's your name?"

"Jingle," he replied.

"Answer me truthfully—you will not be hurt; but if you lie to me I'll shoot you down in your tracks. What have you in that basket?"

"Wittles."

"Where did they come from?"

"De Cedars."

"Who sent them?"

"Mrs. Havens."

"Where are you taking them?"

"Ober dar," and the negro pointed at the Haunted House that could be located by the trees and dense vegetation by which it was surrounded.

"Ain't you afraid to go there?"

"No, massa, what am dere to scare—oh, I forgot, I am orful scared to go dere."

Fred smiled to himself. The servant was evidently following some line of instruction which he had forgotten for the moment.

"See here," said Fred, lowering his voice and stepping closer to the African; "I know all about you, Jingle, and will treat you right. You have been told to let no one know about your visits to the Haunted House—"

"Golly, massa, who tole you dat?"

"Never mind; it's enough that I know it. You are afraid to tell me what you know, but you must do it, nevertheless, or it will be the worse for you."

Convinced that the servant was thoroughly frightened, Fred clinched matters by taking another track.

"I give you my promise that whatever you tell me shall never hurt you. No matter who has threatened, he shall not harm you in the least. Furthermore, I don't expect you to give such information as I want without pay."

Thereupon the strange-looking man, whose identity Jingle did not suspect, handed him a golden eagle.

There was just enough light for the African to identify it as he held it close to his eyes and then "hefted" it in his hand. He fairly gasped with delight, for it was the greatest piece of good fortune that had ever befallen him.

In that moment in which Jingle realized the value of the coin placed in his dusky palm, he bounded, so to speak, from the service of his former employer to that of the munificent stranger. The transfer of his loyalty was complete.

"Now, Jingle, you will keep secret what passes between us."

"Reckons I will, boss, massa, for if I don't I'll be killed and hung and shot."

"Jingle, do you know anything about the death of the overseer, Mr. Warman, four years ago?"

"Yes, sah," he whispered, "I knows all 'bout it; it warn't Massa Captain Bayard dat done it."

"I know that as well as you do. We will step out of the road, where no one in passing can see

us, and talk the matter over. Now, in the first place, did you leave the plantation and start for Buzzard's Roost on that night that Pompey and Pete ran away?"

"Dat's what I done, massa."

"Did you go with them?"

"No, I went alone by myself, widout any one else."

The important story which Fred Hazeltine drew from Jingle, who, he was satisfied, was speaking the truth, was that on the eventful night of the visit to Buzzard's Roost by Pompey and Pete, they did not invite him to go with them. He overheard enough to understand their plan, and, by way of revenge for the slight, determined to give them a good scare.

He followed them some time after their departure, intending to meet them on their return and terrify them out of their wits. On coming near Kirke Warman's house, however, Jingle was so frightened himself lest the overseer should detect him in passing along the highway, that he climbed the fence and started to flank it by going behind the building.

At the very moment he was opposite the rear of the structure he caught the sound of a pistol-shot from within, quickly followed by a second. Jingle was terrified and stood still, not knowing what to do. While he was hesitating, he saw a horseman ride up in front of the house and dismount. He was so far off that Jingle could not identify him, but at the moment of reining up, another man leaped out of the second-story window at the rear and started on a run toward the very spot where Jingle was standing.

The negro was terrified, but it was evident from the action of the man that he was trying to avoid a meeting with the horseman in front and held no suspicion of the servant.

The latter was quick-witted enough to slip behind the trunk of the nearest tree, where he made sure the other could not see him.

As the white man ran, he continually glanced over his shoulder as if to assure himself he was not followed. Thus he paid more attention to what was behind than to what was in front, and Jingle needed but to use ordinary discretion to escape detection.

As the stranger increased his distance from the house, he dropped down to a hurried walk. His disarranged clothing showed that he had been engaged in a violent struggle.

"It was a bright, moonlight night, I believe, Jingle?" remarked Fred, when the negro had finished his striking narrative.

"De moon were shinin' like it war de sun."

"Did you get a fair view of the man's face?"

"I see'd it ten times plainer dan I see yours dis berry minute."

"Who was he?"

The negro stood a minute as if afraid to pronounce the name. Fred Hazeltine leaned forward and said kindly:

"Don't be afraid; you shall suffer no harm for it."

The negro glanced over each shoulder and then behind him, as if fearful of being overheard. Then he pointed at the Haunted House and said in a husky whisper:

"Daere's where he libs, he done it!"

CHAPTER XX.

"EUREKA! I HAVE FOUND IT!"

"You are right," said Fred Hazeltine, repressing his emotion; "but why have you kept this a secret? Such testimony would have cleared poor Captain Bayard."

"I dunno 'zactly how it was," replied Jingle, scratching his head in a puzzled way, "but, somehow or other, dat man found out dat I knowed sumfin' 'bout what took place dat night. Maybe he heard of some words dat I let drap, for he come to me and tooken me off to one side, gib me ten dollars and said he would remember me ag'in if I only kept my mouth shet, but dat if I ever said a word, he would hoot me dead, and I've neber said a word since den till dis night to you, and I wouldn't hab said it to you if you hadn't treated me so nice."

Fred handed another golden coin to Jingle, adding the unnecessary caution for him to keep his secret, and then left him.

Just as the negro was moving away, he called him back and asked how it was he obtained entrance into the Haunted House. The willing servant handed him a key which he said he had carried with him for years. Jingle added full and accurate information about the interior of the building, and the young man walked forward with higher hopes than he had felt since he became the counselor of Captain Burd Bayard.

As he anticipated, he found on approaching

he mysterious building that all was dark and silent as the tomb.

"Many a strange secret is hidden behind those walls," he muttered, as he halted for a minute or two in front of the structure, "but the most momentous of all shall be given up to-night."

Having decided on his course, Fred Hazeltine was not the one to hesitate on the threshold.

Softly trying the heavy front door, he found it locked. The key obtained from Jingle was then inserted, and it turned so readily as to prove that it had performed the same office many times. The door swung inward without the least noise, and, with just an additional flutter of the heart, the young man entered.

The door was closed with the same caution behind him and the key withdrawn. It was not locked of course, for the intruder thought it likely he would find himself in need of the means of a quick and unobstructed withdrawal.

Fairly within the Haunted House, Fred stood in the broad hall already described. It was dimly illuminated by a fire burning on the hearth in the large sitting-room, just as Burd Bayard found when he made his memorable call. Without the least trepidation, the visitor entered the room, and seeing how faint the light was, walked forward and stirred the smoldering fagots on the hearth. The apartment became as light as day.

At this moment, he heard a slight noise overhead, as if some one was walking stealthily over the floor. Fred stood in the attitude of listening, but the sound ceased immediately.

On the mantel, rested volumes which he proceeded to examine. The first was a copy of *Paradise Lost*, the second *Book of Common Prayer*, and the third a Bible. The last was old and yellow with age.

Bending over, so as to allow the light to fall on the page, the lawyer turned to the record of births, marriages and deaths. Two minutes later he straightened up with a start, and the whispered exclamation:

"Eureka! I have found it!"

Found what? He had learned who it was that owned the pistol which caused the death of Kirke Warman and his wife. The problem of the initials, "P. L. M." had been solved, and he could only wonder that it had baffled him so long.

Despite his iron nerves, Fred trembled with excitement, for the discovery could not have been more important.

He was standing thus in deep thought and had just secured control of himself again, when the outer door opened and closed with a bang, and the heavy footfall in the hall showed that some man had entered behind him.

"He is going to enter," was the thought of Fred, who deftly slipped the Bible under his coat, and drew his pistol, for now that he was in for it, he did not mean to be caught at a disadvantage.

He was not a moment too soon. Hardly was the weapon drawn, when the door was shoved open and "P. L. M." stepped into view. He recoiled when he caught sight of the stranger (it will be remembered that Fred Hazeltine was disguised, and demanded:

"What does this mean? Why are you here?"

"I came to spend the night; but I don't like the look of things and will withdraw."

"A burglar, eh, caught in the act? You don't get out of here until you give an account of yourself and I have a chance to search your clothing for stolen goods."

Fred pointed his pistol.

"If you will stand aside, you will save me the trouble of shooting, and I've got your exact range."

It takes a brave man to defy a leveled weapon only a few feet from his face, and P. L. M. was not lacking in discretion.

"Get out, then! If I had had a suspicion, this would be the last burglary you ever committed."

Fred strode toward the door, the other stepping aside out of his way. The lawyer kept his loaded and cocked weapon in his hand, and never once removed his eyes from the other, who was watching his opportunity.

Fred believed he must have a pistol and wondered that he did not draw it. Probably his own alertness prevented the attempt, and he passed out and closed the door behind him without any demonstration from the indignant occupant of the Haunted House.

The handsome young counselor tried hard to walk with a dignified step and to avoid all unbecoming haste of movement, but when the resounding report of a musket rung out on the

night air and the ball nipped his ear, he did not hesitate to leap several feet from the ground and to break into a run which speedily carried him beyond all danger.

Believing that P. L. M. would attempt to follow him, especially if he noticed the absence of the Bible, Fred secreted himself under the shadow of the nearest trees and watched.

Sure enough, a few moments later the figure of a man emerged from the short lane leading to the Haunted House and hurried off in the direction he supposed the burglar had taken.

Fred smiled as he witnessed the action, and, waiting until the fellow was out of sight, he started for home. He had to go only a short distance when he turned off at a fork of the road, and felt safe against encountering the individual again.

It was not unnatural that the young lawyer should feel in jubilant spirits. He was light-hearted and hopeful, and the success of the evening had been unbounded.

"I have found out the owner of the pistol; I have found Jingle who saw and identified the man that shot the overseer; Burd Bayard has not yet been sentenced, but it is to be called up day after to-morrow; I will see the judge to-morrow and secure a stay of proceedings on the ground of newly-discovered and important evidence; another trial will be granted, and everything—What the mischief is up now?"

The last question was caused by the sound of a carriage approaching at a furious rate. It was coming from behind him, and the horse was traveling as he was not accustomed to travel.

"Something extraordinary, sure," concluded Fred, stepping to one side of the road to escape being run over. "My gracious! It's father!"

There could be no mistaking the old gig, which bounded and bobbed and swayed in a way that threatened to shatter it to fragments.

"Helloa, father! hold on!" shouted Fred, leaping into the road behind the vehicle.

But he was just too late. The old physician did not hear him, or, if he did, failed to recognize the voice, and he kept forward with unabated speed.

Fred was fleet of foot, and he started on a run, but the bay mare was at her best pace also, and drew away so rapidly that he quickly gave over the contest.

But he was almost overcome by the sudden dread that his mother had been taken seriously ill, and his father was hastening to her side. It might puzzle him to explain how the intelligence could have been carried so as to bring him in such haste, but his love for his mother shut out all speculation, and he hurried down the road, walking fast, and eager to reach home without delay.

Every other thought was driven away for the moment, by the dreadful anxiety for his beloved parent. He felt that no triumph could compensate for his absence from her death-bed.

Fortunately, he had not far to travel when he dashed into the house, forgetful of his disguise, intent only on learning the truth.

To his unspeakable delight, the first person on which his eyes rested was his mother, who laughed when she looked at the odd make-up of her only child.

"I am glad you have come," she said, after he had hugged and kissed her, "for your father is anxious to see you; he has some important news."

"Where is he?"

"In his office; he turned his horse over to Jack and said he would give a thousand dollars if he could see you at once."

"He shall have that privilege without paying a cent for it," remarked Fred, making a dash for the office, where he found his parent more agitated than he had seen him for years.

"What's up, father?"

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the old physician, springing from his chair and seizing the hand of his son; "I have had an experience to-night that I shall remember all my life."

"I saw you making for home like a crazy person and called to you, but you did not hear me. I am anxious to learn what you have seen that so disturbs you."

"I went up in the mountains this evening to attend a man who has but a day or two to live. Convinced that he must die, he is filled with remorse for his life and made a startling con-

fession. He handed me that pistol, saying he stole it from you."

Fred smiled as he took the weapon, for he recognized it as the one that had been stolen from under his pillow when he was asleep in the old country tavern known as the Black Bear. He briefly related the story.

"That corresponds with what he told me, though he believes it is the pistol with which the overseer was shot and does not know of the mistake he made. But he told me who it was that killed Kirke Warman and his wife."

Fred could not avoid touching the old gentleman.

"But you have known that for four years. Of course you convinced him of his mistake and convinced him that it was Burd Bayard."

"No; it was not Burd; I, like nearly every one else, was mistaken; Burd is as innocent of the crime as I am! Great heavens! suppose it had not been found out for some weeks or months! An innocent person would have been hanged!"

"How long will this man in the mountains live father?"

"He will last twenty-four hours, and perhaps a little longer, but he is doomed. You must see him in the morning and fix this thing up."

"Depend upon it I shall do so."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECRET OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

FRED HAZELTINE, the brilliant counselor and devoted friend of Burd Bayard, did his work thoroughly and well. Early the following morning, he and his father, accompanied, too, by a justice of the peace, rode to the lonely hut in the mountains, back of Buzzard's Roost, where they found Mart Spike within a few hours of his death. He was anxious to do all he could to undo the great wrong to which he had been a party, and his confession was taken down, signed and properly witnessed, so that the keenest judicial mind could pick no flaw in its wording or intent, or weaken its force.

The man who hired Mart Spike and a companion to steal the pistol from Fred Hazeltine, instructed them to secure it at all hazards, even if it was necessary to shoot him. In fact, he preferred that they should do this somewhere along the lonely road, for he believed that he would be thus rid of the only man whom he had to fear—a troublesome intermeddler who seemed unwilling to let matters alone, and who was liable to involve the real criminal in peril at any moment.

While Spike and his companion had been guilty of many crimes, they were reluctant to add murder to them, and so decided upon the scheme which was afterward carried out. Spike's companion, after receiving the reward for his services, fled the country and could not be found.

The true criminal was Jed Johnson, a cousin of Kirke Warman, the murdered overseer, and he committed the crime solely for money. He had been overseer before Warman, and was a cruel taskmaster, who, however, voluntarily resigned his office and took up his residence at the Golden Boar in Buzzard's Roost, accompanied by his deformed wife, who was believed to possess considerable wealth, though the couple were never blessed with children.

The crime was incited by the money which Warman had in his possession, and which was secured by the miscreant, who conducted the business with such skill that, but for the work of Fred Hazeltine, suspicion never would have turned against him.

Jed Johnson married the daughter of Peter L. Morford, living only a few miles from Buzzard's Roost. The pistol had originally belonged to Morford, coming into the possession of Johnson through his wife.

The most carefully-planned crime is sure to have a weak point somewhere which invariably betrays the truth to the skillful eye. The fatal oversight of Jed Johnson was in leaving the tell-tale initials on the finger-guard of the pistol with which he committed the awful deed.

A year previous to the death of Colonel Haven, Johnson and his deformed wife moved into the Haunted House. They kept their presence a secret, so that very few, if any, outside of Colonel Haven's family, knew of the fact.

It is now necessary to take a backward step and return to the terrible night when Kirke Warman and his wife suffered such a shocking death.

It has been told that Burd Bayard escaped

from arrest by the narrowest possible chance, but some features of his experience remain to be made known.

Before he fled from the neighborhood, where nearly every one was hounding him to death, he remained for a couple of days in concealment at The Cedars, under the care of Muriel. So attached were the lovers that, when he made his stealthy flight in the night, she went with him, determined to share his fate.

By some means, never clearly known, Colonel Haven suspected the truth and pursued the couple. He captured his daughter, just as she was about to embark, and came within a hair of shooting Burd Bayard. He got away, however, and the broken-hearted daughter was taken back to The Cedars.

No pen can picture the terrible wrath of Colonel Haven. Proud, high-spirited, imperious, and brooking no opposition to his will, he disowned his daughter, and forbade her ever to speak to him or her mother again. Not only that, but he turned her from his home, saying he cared not whither she went, excepting that if he ever learned she had taken up with the fugitive murderer, he would shoot her dead, even if he had to follow her to the uttermost confines of the earth.

The wife of Colonel Haven dared not thwart his implacable will, or allow him to know that she violated his command in the least respects but she was a mother and could not shut out the love for her only child from her heart. She arranged with Jed Johnson and his wife that Muriel should make her home with them, she paying them liberally for their tenderest and most attentive care.

Doctor Hazeltine also called regularly at the Haunted House to look after the young lady, whose affliction and anguish of mind threatened to become heavier than she could bear. Her brain gave way to a partial extent, but her hallucination was of a mild character and kept her in the house for days and weeks at a time.

Thus matters stood until, at the celebration of the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel at The Cedars, Colonel Haven was fatally stricken with apoplexy. Prompted by an impulse which it would be presumptuous for us to attempt to explain, Muriel hastened to The Cedars that night, and when Colonel Haven drew his last breath, the head of his only child rested on his breast and the two murmured words of affection to each other.

Then Muriel quietly returned to the Haunted House and continued the unspeakably dreary existence she had led so long.

Meanwhile, Jed Johnson cunningly used every means at his command to confirm the belief that the old dwelling was the home of a number of departed spirits. His submissive wife was easily persuaded to act the part of the apparition. The tall, unsightly figure which appeared at the window-panes, and at which Burd Bayard vainly discharged his pistol, was composed mainly of an effigy that her husband constructed. She carried it above her shoulders, and all her strange performances, when critically examined, will be found to have been no more than any person could have accomplished with similar facilities at his disposal.

The wonderful music which so entranced Burd Bayard was the voice of his beloved, who little dreamed of the identity of him held enchanted by its spell.

The mother of Muriel made stolen visits to her daughter and gave her every possible attention. She was compelled to tell her, however, that the prohibition of her father against her marriage to Burd Bayard was irrevocable, and the mother assented, for, as has been shown, she was as implicit a believer in the guilt of the young sea-captain as was the father.

Mrs. Haven was about making arrangements to bring her child beneath her own roof, after the death of her husband, when Burd Bayard appeared on the scene and inaugurated the events we have attempted to describe.

The laws of the human mind are unknown, if not unknowable. The shock caused by the arrest, trial and conviction of Bayard completely restored the tone of Muriel Haven's brain, and she passed through the ordeal like gold which is thus freed of its dross.

The reader will recall that hints have been thrown out concerning another fear which haunted Burd Bayard. It was his dread that his beloved was not yet entirely herself mentally. He fancied, from her manner, that she was not fully responsible for all she said and did,

and it was that fear which checked more than one utterance trembling on his tongue.

The guardian of the gentle girl was the real murderer of Kirke Warman and his wife!

During the trial of Burd Bayard, the wife of Jed Johnson died in the Haunted House. Mrs. Haven immediately removed her daughter to her own home. She saw that the deceased woman was given Christian burial, though as yet the old lady was far from suspecting the whole truth.

When Fred Hazeltine and his friends had completed the transcription of Mart Spike's confession, they reentered the carriage standing at the door and set out for the residence of Judge Huntoon, who presided at the trial of Burd Bayard.

They had not ridden far when the justice, who held the lines, looked back with the remark:

"There's a man on horseback following us."

The others turned their heads, and Fred, who had the keenest vision, asked:

"Who do you suppose it is?"

At that the others looked again, and Doctor Hazeltine said:

"It is Jed Johnson, as sure as I live. I wonder whether he suspects our business?"

"No doubt of it; he is very suspicious and seems hardly ever to have taken his eyes from me."

The individual, who just then occupied the thoughts of all, kept back as though seeking to avoid observation, but when about half the distance was passed he changed his mind. A turn in the road seemed to have given him the idea that the party were on their way to the residence of Judge Huntoon, and he spurred so rapidly forward that in a few minutes he drew rein at their side, at the same moment that the justice of the peace checked the animal he was driving.

He returned the salutation of all three, who saw that his face was unusually pale. Doubtless he suspected the truth.

"Well, did you get it?" was the strange question he asked.

"Get what?" asked the bluff doctor.

"The confession of Mart Spike."

"Yes; we have it all here—every word of it," replied the physician, "and it proves you the greatest scoundrel in Maryland."

"There can be no doubt of that, but the county shall never be put to the expense of my trial."

"Are you going to run away?"

"Yes; in this style."

And before any one could suspect the meaning of the declaration he whipped out his pistol and pointed it at his own forehead.

"Spike told you the truth; I killed Kirke Warman and took his money—good-by!"

The pistol was discharged, and he rolled from his saddle a dead man at the moment his startled horse broke into a gallop and dashed down the highway.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

CAPTAIN BURD BAYARD was filled with strange emotion as he sat in his cell wondering why Fred Hazeltine did not put in an appearance. He had received a message from him that everything was going well and that he would drop in at the earliest moment, but the day was drawing to a close and nothing more was seen or heard from him.

"Everything is going well, so he writes," mused the prisoner, glancing at the note he had read several times, "but though that means a great deal it cannot mean enough. I may be acquitted, and I believe I shall be, but the insuperable obstacle to my union with Muriel remains. Were Colonel Haven alive to see my vindication he might withdraw that prohibition, which is meant for life; but he died without recalling it, and now it never can be recalled. Muriel will not dare disregard that warning of her dead parent, and, no matter what comes, I shall not urge her—"

Here he was at last! The same irrepressible Fred, boiling over with high spirits and hope, and scattering gloom as the sunlight drives out the shadow from the valley.

"Your hand, old fellow!" was the first greeting, as with his hat on the back of his head, the young lawyer thrust his palm forward and gave Burd a pressure of the fingers that made him wince. "Fix up yourself to go home with me!"

"To go home with you!" repeated the amazed prisoner; "are you crazy?"

"I'm blessed if I don't suspect so. Your innocence has been established, the guilty party

has not only been discovered, but he was kind enough to confess before he blew out his brains; Judge Huntoon has ordered your discharge from custody, and my carriage is waiting outside to take you home. I have kept the news quiet, or all the citizens of Buzzard's Roost would be here to give you the royal welcome you deserve."

Burd could only stare with open mouth until his friend became more composed and told the story with which the reader is familiar.

"No words can express my gratitude," said Bayard, sitting in his chair, too faint and weak for the moment to rise to his feet; "under Heaven my everlasting thanks are due you for your noble work. For four years I have rested under a cloud darker than death: when I had given over all hope it has cleared away and I am now bathed in the sunlight of innocence, and command the respect of those who have known me from infancy."

"I cannot complain because I was so generally believed guilty, for no case could have been stronger against me. Men have been hanged many a time for misdeeds that were no more convincingly proven than was the murder of Kirke Warman by me."

"But, Fred," added Captain Bayard, in a tremulous voice, "you can understand that while I feel thus, perfect happiness can never come to me."

"Why not?"

"The bar to my union with Muriel is eternal."

"But when every one knows that if Colonel Haven were living, he would be the first to take you by the hand and ask your pardon for his suspicion, is that not a moral removal of the ban to your union?"

But the hapless prisoner, who now began to stir himself with a view of accompanying his friend from the jail, shook his head.

"I have tried to persuade myself to that view, and at times almost succeeded, but Muriel is a girl with such an extremely sensitive conscience that she would not be satisfied, and it would break my heart to know that she consented to a step against her own conscience."

"You are certain on that point?"

There was a peculiar significance in this question which caused Burd to look inquiringly in the face of his friend, who was standing before him, with his hands shoved deep in his pockets.

"Don't you agree with me?" asked the sailor.

"I do."

"Have you any doubts on that point?"

"None at all; in fact, I know you are right."

"Then how can you jest with me?"

"I love you too much, Burd, to trifle with your feelings: but I have a letter in my pocket which may shed some light on the matter that troubles you so much. Here it is."

As the amazed Burd Bayard took the sealed envelope, his heart gave a painful thrill. He recognized the handwriting of his beloved, and he felt that the supreme moment of his life was at hand.

The letter contained not a word by Muriel. The inclosure was in the handwriting of Colonel Haven and was addressed to Doctor Hazeltine. Bayard noticed, that the date was less than a year previous.

"When the truth came out, this morning," explained Fred Hazeltine, "father sent that letter to Muriel with his congratulations. He said she would understand it without any explanation from him, and you don't need any from me."

And this was the letter, in the handwriting of a man who had been dead more than half a year.

"MY DEAR DOCTOR:—Somehow or other a strange thought has troubled me of late. I have found myself more than once struggling with the question, 'Can it be possible, after all, that Burd Bayard did not assassinate Kirke Warman and his wife?' I am impatient with myself that such a question should enter my thoughts, for never was there a clearer case in the history of crime and criminals; but, self-disgusted as I am, I cannot drive the question from my mind. Like the ghost in the play it will not down."

"I am sitting alone to-night with the feeling stronger upon me than ever that there is a possibility that a fearful wrong has been done the young man whom I once loved as my own son. I am not superstitious, but it may be that therein I see the shadow of coming events, and I may be nearer my own end than my friends will think."

"You will understand from what I have written why it is I am prompted to put on paper my wish that if ever in the order of Providence the innocence of Burd Bayard should be estab-

lished, you will convey my prayer for the forgiveness to him, in case you are living, and I am not, and say to him that my most earnest prayer is that he and Muriel may become man and wife.

"In case the mystery remains unsolved at your death, you will leave this paper to your son, who will not make its contents known except the contingency I have named arises.

"I hope that Burd Bayard's innocence may be proven, though I fear it will not be. However, I feel better for having put this on paper, for I have averted all possibility of any human being suffering wrong through act of mine.

"LLOYD HAVEN."

We have said that the letter contained nothing from the pen of Muriel Haven. That assertion must be qualified. At the bottom of this extraordinary missive was the following sentence in her well-known graceful hand:

"My dearest, I await your coming! M. H."

Palermo lay shimmering in the sunlight one summer day. Never did that lovely plain, inclosed in mountains and known as the "Golden Shell," look more enchanting than when, crowned with its wealth of tropical vegetation, the trio of surrounding lofty ridges were bathed in blue of the cloudless sky. The Marina, that remarkable terrace, swept for a mile along the bay, and the Saracen architecture of the city was as quaint and grim and striking as on that Easter day, March 30, 1282, when the natives rose against Charles of Anjou and inaugurated the great massacre which has come down in history under the name of the "Sicilian Vespers."

Among the shipping in the harbor was the saucy American vessel, the Albatross, on the point of hoisting sail and passing out on the broad bosom of the Mediterranean. Mate Simmons is now the captain, and when all is ready, a boat is descried approaching the Albatross in haste. The lady and gentleman who are being rowed out on the water are evidently expected, for pleased looks appear on the faces of the crew, who are the same men that made such a sturdy effort to rescue their beloved captain when he lay in the jail at Buzzard's Roost on the other side of the world awaiting a shameful death.

It is Burd Bayard and his wife who step on deck and receive right royal welcome from his devoted friends, that are never tired of hearing from his lips the wonderful story of his rescue from the jaws of death and of his union with the beautiful and lovely Muriel Haven, whose devotion to him never faltered.

And when the prow of the Albatross cleaves the blue Mediterranean, she bears with her the couple, blessed and happy in each other's love. The Albatross does not hesitate to sail straight up the Chesapeake and drop anchor almost in the identical spot where she lay on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Before leaving her deck for the last time, Burd Bayard makes over to Captain Simmons and his crew the entire ownership of the little vessel all love so well.

And as wife and husband step upon the wharf and shortly after start for their home at The Cedars, they are met by the dignified, happy mother, who unfolds each in turn with a murmured "God bless you, my children!"

THE END.

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